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Ralf Dahrendorf:
The Future of Europe

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Partisan Review 4

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Trends and Trendiness

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David James Fisher
Homage to Bettelheim

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In Kafka's House

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At the Galleries

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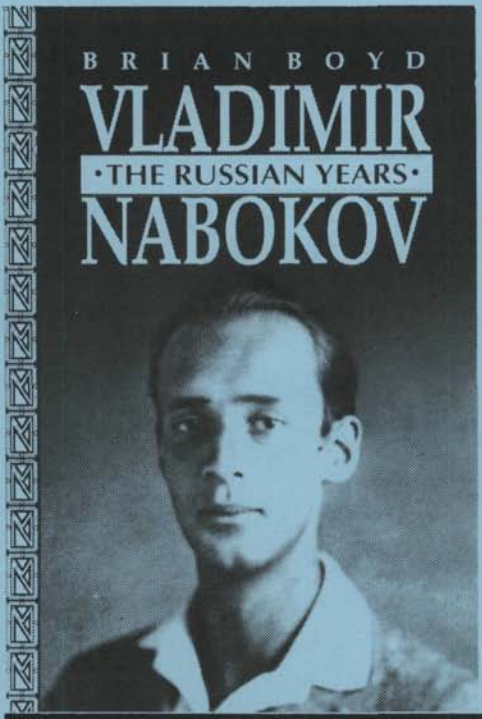

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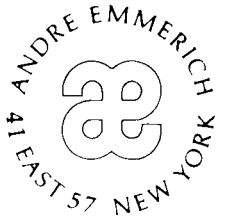

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COMMENT

Harvard University, which, according to Henry Rosovsky, has resisted the demolition of traditional education, has finally succumbed to the virus of trendiness. Harvard University Press has just issued a coffetable-size book (accompanied by audiocassette recordings) consisting of the first of the six Norton Lectures and seminars given by John Cage. Let me say at once that the book notably represents the essence of mod thinking but is so far out that it is virtually unreadable. This is not to say that serious writing should be reduced to journalese, but surely esthetic sanity requires a recognition of limits; new art has to have its proper place in the development of the medium. Those of us who championed modernism against realism and philistinism always have been open to genuine experiment and advance in all the arts. We were excited by such imaginative innovations as, for example, Beckett's *Waiting for Godot*, Gênet's *The Balcony*, and Joyce's *Ulysses*.

As for Cage's music, I recall being baffled by a concert he gave in New York many years ago, where the performance consisted of playing twelve radios simultaneously. It was clearly a premature postmodernist work. Music critics who have promoted Cage admit his music represents a form of chaos, but, they claim, it is "controlled chaos."

Perhaps my knowledge of music is not sophisticated enough to understand the latest advances. But Cage's lectures seem to be cut from the same cloth as his music. The first talk begins:

Much of **our**
Much of **our**
of borEdom
Toward talks in
it misled him
diplOmatic skill to
place to place ´ but Does it look
at present **Most**
fivE Iranian fishermen
cuTbacks would not
wHat i have ´ but
pOssibilities

Here is another passage, selected at random:

Using these
aM So
so confidenT the
him A world
Not
Could
text

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iS
which
am remembering
endeavoR it
Came after
WoUld
aM

The rest of the book is in the same vein.

These days, anything goes in the name of novelty. And shock that no longer shocks has become standard fare in the world of the arts. Of course, those who are critical of postmodern excesses are bound to be labelled conservatives, defenders of the status quo. But this response can be recognized as the rationalization by means of which the new fashions justify themselves. The truth is that not everything that presents itself as advanced art is either advanced or art.

* * *

Louis Menand makes an interesting point in a review of Roger Kimball's book, *Tenured Radicals* – one that is almost never made. In reply to those who claim that the academy is unusually responsive to some of the absurd notions generated by deconstructionist theory, feminist literary extremism, internalized black studies, outdated neo-Marxism, and other "radical" professorial pursuits, Menand maintains that this is not the whole story. Why make a fuss, says Menand, about the latest intellectual fashions, when the academy has always been a breeding ground for its own brand of nonsense. Indeed, argues Menand, one of the functions of the academy is to institutionalize the higher mediocrity.

There is something to be said for this rather cynical picture of the university. We are familiar with the progress of literary studies from the earlier dreary scholarship to the endless *explication de texte*, both of which were European imports, and with the arid results of overspecialization and meaningless research in other areas. On the other hand, I think Menand underestimates the sway of the latest theories. He dismisses too easily the power, the pervasiveness, the articulateness, the aggressiveness, the organization, and the influence of the new theorists. Its purveyors control institutes and departments: they run a large number of academic publications. Above all, they create a certain climate of opinion that envelops students and silences colleagues.

* * *

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Helen Vendler is to be commended for her excellent and courageous review of several books of feminist literary theory, including books by Sandra Gilbert and Susan Gubar, in *The New York Review of Books*. It is a model of critical writing: moderate, just, exact, not polemically triumphant, and patient in its presentation of facts and arguments. It is courageous because though there is a good deal of privately expressed disdain by many writers and critics of the more extreme feminist literary theories, there has been very little sophisticated and informed examination of the field. There have been occasional hard-core polemics, but most writing on the subject has consisted of celebration and mutual praise. On the other hand, radical feminists are not very receptive to criticism; they usually consider it to be an expression of male-oriented thinking and, even though they might disagree among themselves, they often close ranks in response to outside criticism.

Sure enough, Gilbert and Gubar replied to Vendler's criticism of their books in a long, rambling letter in *The New York Review of Books* that is badly argued, badly written, bad-tempered, question-begging, and personal. They begin by wondering why Vendler has deteriorated as a critic. Then they accuse her of being aged, of having been brought up on the New Criticism, and of being uncomfortable in the community of women. Finally, they attribute her criticism of them to flaws in her personality. But they fail to understand Vendler's main point, that much feminist theory, including Gilbert and Gubar's books, reduces works of literature to their manifest, explicit content, to polemical tracts, and that it treats characters in fiction not as imaginative projections, typifying complex and enduring human conflicts, myths, and mores, but as real people of whom one approves or disapproves. Vendler's rejoinder, it is worth noting, is admirably restrained.

* * *

The polarization was bound to happen. It is an old story. For one of the lessons of history is that the right and left feed off and need each other. The campaign by the left to pressure the government to award NEA grants to pornographic material and performances was sure to create a backlash. And the backlash, as expected, goes to the other end of the political spectrum. Patrick Buchanan, for example, in *The New York Post*, inveighed against all modernist art and literature.

The right, as the past has shown, does not always need a left target; but it finds it easier to justify itself when it has one. So the political merry-go-round continues: the left provokes the right, and the right's excesses are used to justify those of the left. Both exclude the middle ground: the left sees nothing between itself and the opposite extreme; the right takes the position of the left as typical of everything in between. Thus the supporters of Mapplethorpe argue that any criticism of his work applies to all modern art;

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while the right-wing response to Mapplethorpe similarly identifies him with modernism as a whole.

* * *

To be sure, the far right has bigger fish to fry than Mapplethorpe. At least part of it, faced with the possibility of further military action by Bush against Iraq, has turned isolationist and pacifist. And, led by its most articulate spokesmen, Patrick Buchanan, Roland Evans and Robert Novak, it has launched a campaign against a military strike to oust Hussein from Kuwait and to topple him from power. Obviously, it is surprising to see the political right, long known as hawkish and the first to denounce dovish and appeasing tactics as un-American, suddenly take the dovish posture usually associated with the left. In this situation, it is worth noting that the left has been silenced by – if not convinced by – the Soviet Union's support of Bush's initiative. But the left has not been shouting for the invasion of Iraq or its ouster from Kuwait.

How is this political somersault to be explained? One thing seems clear: the newspaper columns of Buchanan, Evans and Novak, for example, in *The New York Post*, would indicate that the motives for this shift may be found in a desire not to alienate the Arabs and a lack of concern with the fate of Israel, if not outright hostility to the Jewish State. Evans and Novak, as well as Buchanan, have been shrilly arguing that American interests are not involved in the Persian Gulf crisis. The price of oil, they insist, is not a sufficient cause for war, especially since there is no reason to believe that oil would stop flowing. Nor, they claim, should the invasion of Kuwait and the ouster of the ruling family be a reason for sacrificing American lives. Chauvinism has turned to pacifism in the deserts of the Mideast.

Now, if the issues were simply the price of oil and saving the rulers of Kuwait and Saudi Arabia, then the argument against intervening would have considerable plausibility. But when we consider that the entire balance of power in the Mideast is being drastically upset by Hussein, and that the danger to Israel's security is immeasurably increased – when we consider that Israel is the one stabilizing force and the one outpost of Western civilization in the region, it should be clear, contrary to what the right-wingers are saying, that action against Hussein is in the national interest. And the newly found pacifism of the right becomes very suspect.

* * *

What has happened to our sense of proportion when all kinds of questionable cultural activities are funded and such a distinguished journal as *The Yale Review* is cut off? Even more puzzling are the reasons given by Yale University's President Benno Schmidt for the decision to discontinue

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supporting the magazine. It is not an outlet, says Schmidt, for work by the Yale faculty. Could it be that Schmidt does not understand the difference between a respected national literary publication and a house organ? And we are led to wonder whether that part of the faculty occupied with deconstructive theory and canon-bashing has resented the independence of *The Yale Review*. Another reason for cutting off support to the journal that has been given by President Schmidt is that Yale cannot afford to continue to give a subsidy – which could not amount to more than the salaries of two professors – to the magazine. This is hard to believe of one of the richest universities in the country. After all, many universities with much smaller endowments and lower tuitions than Yale manage to support literary magazines of general interest. Apparently, Yale has other priorities, some of which, we can be sure, are not of greater intellectual value than *The Yale Review*. Whatever the motives, stated or unstated, might be for the suspension of the publication, it is a myopic act, unworthy of a great university.

(Chester Kerr, a former head of the Yale University Press, has sent a letter of protest to President Schmidt, signed by fifty-five distinguished writers and editors.)

W. P.

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Ralf Dahrendorf

NO THIRD WAY

As I allow my enthusiasm for the open society to run away with rational argument, it occurs to me that you may be a little too pleased with some of my remarks. You too have your doubts about Hayek, and you want some mixture of socialist achievements and liberal opportunities to prevail. Unbridled capitalism, you think, is not such a good thing, and you may therefore wish to enlist me as one of your supporters on the road to Social Democracy. I do not share the widespread obsession with labels and am therefore not particularly upset about being called a Social Democrat, though I have difficulties with the Italian epithet, *liberalsocialista*, because I prefer to think of myself as a radical liberal for whom the social entitlements of citizenship are as important a condition of progress as the opportunities for choice, which require entrepreneurial initiative and an innovative spirit. But before we get to normal politics, the point has to be made unequivocally that socialism is dead, and that none of its variants can be revived for a world awakening from the double nightmare of Stalinism and Brezhnevism.

Lest you think such language unnecessarily cruel, let me tell you about a book which has to do with my own political philosophy, George Dangerfield's *The Strange Death of Liberal England*, which first appeared in 1935. Dangerfield traces the curious story of the great triumph of the British Liberals under the Asquith ministry after 1908, and the hubris which led to their rapid decline from 1913 onward. "It was in these years that that highly moral, that generous, that dyspeptic, that utterly undefinable organism known as the Liberal Party died the death. It died from poison administered by its Conservative foes, and from disillusion over the inefficacy of the word 'Reform.' And the last breath which fluttered in this historical flesh was extinguished by War." Dangerfield is not naive; he knows that political parties can appear to survive their death. "I realize, of course, that the word 'liberal' will always have a meaning as long as there is one democracy left in the world, or any remnant of a middle class: but the true pre-war Liberalism – supported, as it still was in 1910, by Free Trade, a majority in Parliament, the Ten Commandments, and the illusion of Progress – can never return. It was killed, or killed itself, in 1913." Dangerfield adds, for good measure, "And a very good thing too."

It is hard to resist the temptation to replace the year 1913 in these observations by 1989, and the word "liberalism" by "socialism," or at any rate "Social Democracy" – supported, as it still was in the 1970s, by

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economic planning, a majority in parliament, the creed of social service and the illusion of "makeability." But (you will point out immediately) is this not conflating two different things? There is socialism in its Communist version – which collapsed dramatically in 1989 when country after country took the word out of its official description ("Socialist Republic of . . . "), and parties like your own and those of Hungary and even of Italy sought a less offensive label – and there is Social Democracy, which if it died at all "perished in the dark" (thus Lord Selborne during the debate on the Parliament Act in 1911), unnoticed by many, because to all intents and purposes it is still very much around. Many other socialisms have cropped up in the last century and a half, but Communism (which has also been described as "really existing socialism" while it really existed) and Social Democracy (sometimes called, *pour épater les bourgeois*, "democratic socialism") are the only two of any historical weight. Their story needs to be told, however briefly, in order to sort out what it means to speak of the strange death of socialism in the 1980s.

I suppose it all started in post-Napoleonic Europe, or more to the point, in the second phase of the industrial era, notably in England and France. Thoughtful people – bourgeois, no doubt – were upset by the plight of the laboring classes and began to think of remedies. These had certain ingredients in common. One was that there was something wrong with the way in which private property had come to be used; to redress such wrongs, property had to be "socialized" in one way or another. Another feature was that people's positions in society had become altogether too unequal; variants of egalitarianism accompanied socialism from its earliest days. The notion that things could, and had, to be done by deliberate planning rather than left to their own resources, to the "market," follows naturally. The cool rationality of such analyses was invariably coupled with more intangible and emotional hopes for a different way of living together, a sense of brotherly love, a desire to break the vicious cash nexus by voluntary cooperation, and the spirit of solidarity. An alliance of intellectuals and the working class turned this mix into the vision of an altogether different world – Henri de Saint-Simon's "New Christianity," Robert Owen's "New Society." Moreover, the new world had to be fought for by organizing either islands of a better future or movements to transform the present.

Marx did not like these notions of the Saint-Simons and Owens, Cabets and Fouriers, Proudhons and Weitlings. He scorned the attempt to confront the miseries of the present with alternatives which were mere "phantasies." Instead, he invoked the inexorable march of History with a capital *H*. The New Society was not a desirable prospect but the necessary outcome of the contradictions and conflicts of bourgeois capitalism. This is where the notion of systems crept into socialism and allied itself with the Utopian vision which had been there all along. It does not matter what people want or visualize for themselves – indeed, people do not matter – for they merely execute the will

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of History, and History has chosen the proletariat to become the agent of productive forces which will overcome the capitalist mode of production and create the New Society, socialist first and Communist when it has fully matured.

The parties formed in the name of the *Communist Manifesto* liked to threaten the powers that be with the inevitability of their downfall and the victory of socialism, but they were never strictly Marxist. It would actually be rather difficult to set up a trade union or a political party on the assumption that such movements are mere puppets of great impersonal forces. To have history on one's side – rather, to hear leaders tell one that this is the case – may sound encouraging to some, but an un-Marxian element of voluntarism crept into the socialist movement from the start. In England it was dominant from the Chartists to the Fabians and further to the Labour Party. With the formation of parties and a growing belief in their capacity to change things here and now came Social Democracy, that is, the grudging yet sincere acceptance of the rules of the open society. Versions of positivism entered into a curious marriage with socialism. By 1914 liberalism may have died, but socialism was alive and kicking in the democracies of Europe, and its parliamentary representatives voted for the war loans of their respective governments just as proletarians of all countries went to war against each other instead of uniting behind the red flag.

The events of 1917 do not mark just another stage of the same development. While Lenin obviously belonged in the tradition to which I have alluded here with almost frivolous lightness, the framework of his analysis owes little if anything to the growth of Social Democracy in Europe, a great deal to uniquely Russian traditions, and an important impetus to Marx. The reason for this particular debt is in many ways perverse, because it derives from an error of theory and of history which needs to be exposed. As you know, Marx tried to link the struggle of classes to underlying socioeconomic forces. The suppressed class draws its strength as well as its rhetoric from forces of production which are held back by the ruling class and by the mode of production which it represents. Marx needed the conflation of politics and economics to make the case for the inexorable march of History, but he had little history to go on. Some kind of class struggle had (perhaps) provided ammunition for the French Revolution; the Industrial Revolution can (probably) be described as the unavoidable removal of an older mode of production in order to make way for the new forces of technology, enterprise, and wage labor. The two revolutions, however, did not happen in the same place or at the same time, except in the books of Marx and Engels, where the revolt of the Third Estate and the breakthrough of industrial production were superimposed by the strokes of two pens.

Marx was more interested in the revolution of the future than in those of the past. However, his theory in all its abstract splendor made little sense

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for this prospect either. The proletariat never represented a new force of production; it was a class of exploited and downtrodden industrial workers who needed to find a place in the sun of this world here and now. Marx himself was hard-pressed to identify the underlying socioeconomic force of the revolutionary movement which he tried to promote, for "associated producers" and "socialized ownership" are hardly compelling motives for change (especially if joint-stock companies are regarded as "a necessary transitional point" on the road to socialism). Yet by a curious fluke, Marx's theory made sense for Russia. Indeed, it made sense for all countries which entered the modern world late, and had to achieve political and economic modernization simultaneously and quickly. As older feudal or colonial elites were removed, those who took over could claim to do so in the name of hitherto repressed opportunities for economic growth. Contrary to the early English or American or French or Dutch bourgeoisie, they had no past economic achievement or wealth to rely on, nor were they a *Bildungsbürgertum* in the German sense, an "educated bourgeoisie" (to use a term by which Keynes described his own origins); instead, political power was the sole base of their position. Thus, it came about that a class rose to hegemony which had nothing but the Party to support it, but which set in motion a slow and ultimately ineffectual process of industrialization. "Communism," as Lenin put it crisply, "is Soviet power plus the electrification of the whole country."

Socialism of this brand – Communism – is in other words a developing-country phenomenon. Despite some islands of sophistication and even of capitalism, Russia in 1917 was by and large a developing country in this sense. So was China in 1949, as were the many third world nations which found it convenient to rely on the Soviet model, and on support by the older second world nations to boot. *Nomenklatura* socialism – some call it "administrative centralism" or even "democratic centralism" – became the preferred mode of late modernization.

It was, as we know today, not a very effective method. Its effectiveness remained largely confined to the destruction of the old authoritarian regime. This was accomplished with utter ruthlessness. The "harvest of sorrow" in the Ukraine and beyond (to use Robert Conquest's description) and the Chinese Cultural Revolution are two unforgettable and unforgivable examples, though Idi Amin and "Emperor" Bokassa and Pol Pot and other third world "modernizers," often in the name of socialism, will not be forgotten and forgiven either. The destructive part of the process did lead to a certain leveling of inherited social hierarchies and the creation of the institutions (though often merely the trappings) of modern states. It also laid certain foundations of modern economic development: elements of infrastructure (though often more symbolic than useful), generalized education (though often for purposes of mobilization as much as skill formation), large industrial complexes (though often geared to state, above all, military, purposes rather than consumer de-

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mand). But the process failed to do that crucial trick which the "Protestant ethic" achieved in some parts of the Western world, that is, to provide an incentive for saving, and for that deferred gratification which is a condition of early industrial success. People must be prepared to allow an accumulation of capital which sets the growth machine in motion. They may do so voluntarily – because they believe it is morally right, or because they can see the light at the end of the tunnel – but if they do not, they must be compelled to consume less than they produce. This is how forced labor came to be an indispensable ingredient of really existing socialism, as well as shortages and queues and in the end a huge and useless "overhang" of worthless money. The logic of Communist regimes made exploitation and suppression as inevitable as scarcity and pretense.

The promise of socialism of the Communist variety was a quick and painless way out of authoritarian rule and preindustrial poverty. Modernity without Napoleon and the ginhouses, as it were. In fact, the peoples of the third world, including the Soviet Union, got both, dictators and misery. Above all, they got what Milovan Djilas first called a "new class" of party officials. This class increasingly hardened into a large *nomenklatura*. The more rigid it became, the less sustainable was its rule. The combination of ineffectiveness and suppression eventually set in motion the process of self-destruction which we have watched in recent years. In other words, socialism is not only a developing-country phenomenon, but it is also one which cannot be upheld beyond the initial stages of development. Sooner or later it has to give way to more open and effective modes of economic advancement and probably political involvement as well. Really existing socialism cannot last.

There are those in the Soviet Union and elsewhere in the post-Communist world who speak today of a "return to capitalism." They are wrong in more ways than one, but above all inclining to Marx's mistaken assumption that socialism succeeds capitalism. In fact, the opposite is the case. Market-oriented economies based on incentives rather than planning and force represent an advanced stage of modern development. In this sense capitalism succeeds socialism – in those countries where the socialist option was the chosen method of entering the modern world. This is of course not the case in your country, let alone in East Germany and Czechoslovakia, where really existing socialism was the result of the hegemonic aspirations of the Soviet Union and stunted the hopeful saplings of the process of modernization. One can understand that, faced with the rubble left behind by the Second World War, large numbers of people were prepared to embrace any promise of progress on offer, including *nomenklatura* socialism, but after forty years the balance sheets of the regimes under its yoke show almost exclusively red figures. Soviet-style socialism in the advanced countries of East Central Europe was a tragedy without relief.

The year 1917 had more than one effect. It established really existing

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socialism of the developing-country variety, but it also encouraged those in more developed countries who were unhappy about what they saw as the accommodation of socialist parties to the status quo to remain on a more absolute course. Communist parties came into being which have played a horrific and often murderous part in the long-running battles with Social Democrats, notably in the Spanish Civil War, during the years of the Hitler-Stalin Pact, and in some European countries during the immediate postwar period as well. When the Soviets forced the countries of your region under their rule by forming "popular fronts," "unity parties," or merely Communist-dominated "coalitions," they could rely on Communist parties of varying but not inconsiderable strength. The fifth column was there to support their claims, and while the false god of Communism failed most of its believers (as Arthur Koestler, Ignazio Silone, Stephen Spender, and others have told us), it failed too late and too slowly.

It is important to remember this nightmare from which we are waking up today. I remember it well, for I was a young man in Berlin when the Russians came at the end of April 1945. Our family welcomed them warmly because I had been hiding for weeks after my unexpected release from the concentration camp in which I had spent the previous winter, and above all because we were waiting for my father, who was in prison for his involvement in the Resistance – notably in the plot to assassinate Hitler on July 20, 1944. He survived, but his friends who were killed by the Nazis had left him the message that there must never be disunity in the labor movement again. At first, the Communist leaders who had returned from their Soviet exile did not want to hear this message. They thought that they could go it alone, and in any case they did not like the Social Democrats, whom they had denounced as "social fascists" a mere five years before. Within a year, attitudes turned full circle. Soon the Communists realized that they would not win free elections; apart from the Italian city of Bologna, the Indian state of Kerala, and one or two other places, Communists have never won free elections anywhere, and so they put pressure on the Social Democrats to form a "Socialist Unity Party." By that time my father, who never succumbed to the pressures or the temptations of totalitarianism of any ilk, had made up his mind. As vice-chairman of the Central Committee of the East German Social Democrats, he voted against the forced merger, and had to flee to the West. I confess that while *Schadenfreude* is not the most noble of emotions, I watched with some pleasure the disintegration of that miserable assemblage of privileged cowards which called itself the SED.

On all this, however, you probably agree. But what about the other, the Social Democratic, thread of development since 1917? One key difference is now apparent. Whereas Communism and really existing socialism engaged in their own constitutional politics and set up monopolies of unfettered party power wherever they could, Social Democracy after 1917

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became clearly and (except for some fringe groups) unambiguously a part of normal politics in the democracies of the world. Some thought that this was exactly what was wrong with it. It has to be admitted that Ramsay MacDonald and Hermann Müller and perhaps even Léon Blum were not the most inspiring leaders of political parties committed to radical reform. But it is also true that by involving themselves in normal politics, Social Democrats became staunch defenders of the constitution of liberty. Democracy and the rule of law were in good hands with them. As newcomers to its pastures, they showed if anything a greater commitment to the values and institutions of the open society than older liberals.

So what went wrong? Did anything go wrong? You reminded me of the article I wrote a few years ago called "The Misery of Social Democracy," which obviously caused you some heartache. (In this you are not alone; Willy Brandt, in his farewell speech as leader of the West German Social Democrats, expressed pained bewilderment: "I have asked myself time and again which decades those contemporaries had in mind who thought that the Social Democratic century is over. Have they overlooked the two wars, fascism and Stalinism, the great economic crises and the new existential threats?") At the time, I started with the straightforward observation that Social Democratic parties all over Europe were not doing very well, and those who were doing well, like those of Spain and perhaps Italy, were not particularly Social Democratic. Advocating a decent society was evidently no longer good enough for the electorate of advanced societies. What had brought about this change of fortunes for the dominant political force of a century?

The simplest answer is victory. Like the British Liberals in 1911, Social Democrats had conquered Europe by the end of the 1970s. Their combination of democracy and planning, of economic freedom and demand management, of individual choice and redistribution, of liberty and justice, had become the dominant reality of the OECD world (though the United States went partly its own way and never fully recognized the social rights of citizenship). We were all Social Democrats then, and in important respects we still are.

For the people of the developed world, this was fine, but for Social Democracy it was fatal. The creation of a large majority of those who could hope to satisfy many of their aspirations within existing conditions – a majority class – made Social Democratic parties either a protective, not to say conservative, force or dispensable, or both. The emergence of a majority class (sometimes called a middle class, thought the concept is misleading in the absence of an upper class which sets the tone, and a cohesive working class) meant above all that the traditional social base of Social Democracy had melted away. The working class had disappointed its intellectual leaders; contrary to their assumptions, it was actually not a particularly progressive

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social force, but one that sought "law and order" as much as social and economic advancement, and whose members were in the end quite pleased to make it for themselves and their families, never mind all the others. Class conflict was transformed into individual social mobility. The prevalence of this pattern in America in the form of the "American dream," if not always its reality, has often been cited as the reason for the absence of socialist parties in that country; now the same behavior began to spread in Europe. As the process went on, the working class not only lost its cohesion, but began to shrink. A new middle class of white-collar employees emerged, and while their market position may have seemed similar to that of workers, they never saw themselves as a part of the proletariat. The shift from manufacturing to services reduced the industrial working class to a minority, and one whose status could no longer be described as neglected or downtrodden.

The crumbling traditional base of Social Democratic parties was accompanied by another effect of their victory. Social Democracy has had a peculiar affinity to the state. Far from fighting it as the "body which administers the common business interests of the bourgeois class (in Marx and Engels's formulation), Social Democrats used it to redress the injustices of capitalism. John Maynard Keynes and William Beveridge were both Liberals by party affiliation, but Keynesian economic policy and Beveridge-type social policy became hallmarks of Social Democracy. "Policy" always means a greater role for government. This in turn led to the expansion of the planning apparatus, of bureaucracy. Social Democracy became increasingly associated with bureaucracy, to the point where, in some countries, such as Sweden, it turned into the party of public servants. Elsewhere, it has been described as the "teachers' party" (teachers being public servants in most European countries) or the "party of local government employees," which amounts to the same thing.

The quandary is evident. While there may still be much to do in order to complete the Social Democratic project, its traditional support has dwindled as a consequence of its success. Moreover, the link of Social Democracy with bureaucracy puts the old reformist force into a strange predicament. After all, bureaucracy is in a sense the democratic *nomenklatura* which, if we follow Max Weber's fears, may yet imprison us all in a new "cage of bondage." One aspect of the 1980s in the OECD world is the protest not only against the economic stagflation of the 1970s but also against the political dependence on bureaucracy. People have an elementary desire to do things their way rather than be pushed about by characters in offices who make them fill out forms and wait in queues for unsatisfactory answers.

I realize, of course, that the phrase "Social Democratic" will always have a meaning as long as there is one democracy left in the world, or any remnant of a working class. This is paraphrasing Dangerfield yet again, but so far as the working class is concerned, I am not even sure it is true. The

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remaining working class is by no means a safe reservoir for Social Democratic votes. Anyway, Social Democracy is in trouble, and it is in trouble at the very time at which more absolute versions of socialism have run aground. Does this mean (you asked me) that the Social Democratic option is foreclosed for those who have abandoned Communism?

The time has come to face squarely one issue which vitiates much of the debate about democratization in Europe. It has somewhat awkward names, all of which aim at describing a halfway house between the realities of what used to be the West and what used to be the East. Some speak of a "middle way," some of a "third way," and all believe that it would be wrong to shed the achievements of forty years of socialism and swallow capitalism lock, stock, and barrel. Surely – you seemed to say when we talked – there must be a place for a decent social and democratic or even democratic-socialist policy somewhere in between the extremes of what you had and what we have. This sounds good, even plausible, yet it is the wrong way to approach the tasks which lie ahead both in theory and in practice.

Instead of taking up Milovan Djilas, Ota Sik, Rudolf Bahro, or other writers from socialist countries, or the great advocate of humane capitalism in the 1960s and 1970s, Andrew Shonfield, let me use a Swiss author to make my case. The said author recently wrote a calm and reasoned article in the liberal *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* on "the possibility of a third way for Eastern Europe." He cautions the West against the self-important arrogance of the view that the collapse of really existing socialism leaves no alternative to its victims but to adopt all features of democratic and capitalist market economies on the grounds that one cannot be "a little pregnant." The author reminds us of the "pure doctrine of capitalism": self-organization, private property, the market, reliable rules of the game. He adds that the reality of the West is often far from this doctrine, and makes a number of points. Private property has changed its complexion in giant enterprises which are run by people who do not own them; at the other end, small family-owned firms are by no means a model of efficiency. Planning and market forces have long ceased to be incompatible; the real question is where to draw the boundary between the two. Transparent cost and price structures are a good idea, but very far from the murky reality of the "markets" for agricultural products, or the labor "market." The free movement of people, or even of goods, is as much a promise as it is a reality. "Let us not be more popish than the pope," he counsels.

So far so good. But the author then links his observations with a plea for "Utopian visions" which "transcend systems." There is much space for reform everywhere (he argues), and the analogy to being "a little pregnant" is a misleading description of economic structures in view of the need to seek complex mixtures of elements. This need has to be explored "across the systems without ideological prejudice and self-important arrogance. Liberal

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and socialist Utopias might thus be turned into a synergetic third." The "socialist Utopia" could be enriched by entrepreneurial initiative, and the "capitalist Utopia" by the insight that the economy serves human beings, and not vice versa. Thus, we should begin "the kind of intercultural dialogue which might lead to a variegated and dynamic path to Central Europe."

"No" is the simple answer to this demand. We should not engage in this "intercultural dialogue," and more, the very idea needs to be quashed. It is wrong because it is another version of system thinking, and thinking in terms of systems lies at the bottom of illiberalism in all its varieties. It is no accident that our author uses notions like "transcending systems," or exploring ideas "across the systems." This is how he sees the world. The only difference from, for instance, Fukuyama, is that he wants to introduce a third system, "Central Europe" as it were, halfway between socialism and capitalism. (I know that you like the notion of Central Europe because you do not want to be labeled East European; indeed Poland has set its clocks to Central European Time throughout all these years and against Soviet pressure as well as the logic of geography; but the concept is nonetheless laden with ideological baggage – especially in its German incarnation, which brings back the "National Socialist" Friedrich Naumann and his *Mitteleuropa* as well as other unsavory characters – so let us be careful in using it!) Our Swiss author fortunately calls the system "variegated" but is nevertheless taken by its "Utopian" qualities. His is a kind of Rousseauean Utopia in which the "ritual competition between majority-forming pseudoalternatives" is replaced by "committed discussions of political programs" and of course a good dose of "human warmth, empathy, and solidarity."

We must beware of Utopia too, and not only if it is of the Rousseauean variety. Utopia is in the nature of the idea a total society. It may exist "nowhere," but it is held up as a counterproject to the realities of the world in which we are living. Utopia is a complete alternative, and therefore of necessity a closed society. Why did I not write the planned anti-Orwell book, *Nineteen Eighty-nine*? Because I could not find a way out of Big Brother's *Nineteen Eighty-four* for Winston Smith. Benevolent Utopias are no better. Karl Popper's demolition of Plato's *Republic* has precisely this theme. Whoever sets out to implement Utopian plans will in the first instance have to wipe clean the canvas on which the real world is painted. This is a brutal process of destruction. Second, a new world will have to be constructed which is bound to lead to errors and failures, and will in any case require awkward transitional periods like the "dictatorship of the proletariat." The probability must be high that in the end we will be stuck with the transition; dictators are not in the habit of giving up their power. The Utopian, writes Popper, "may seek his heavenly city in the past or in the future; [he] may preach 'back to nature' or 'forward to a world of love and beauty'; but [the] appeal is always to our emotions rather than to reason. Even with the best intentions of mak-

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ing heaven on earth it only succeeds in making it a hell – that hell which man alone can prepare for his fellow-men."

All this applies to the Utopia of the middle way as it does to all others. As a complete "third system" it remains primarily a system, never mind the "third" or "fourth" or "fifth." In the conflicts between advocates of systems and defenders of the open society, it therefore belongs on the side of illiberalism where all systems have their place. Neither Central Europe nor Social Democracy nor any other euphemism for the "middle way" must be thought of as a system, or indeed a Utopia, if liberty is what we want. The choice between freedom and serfdom is stark and clear, and it offers no halfway house for those weaker souls who would like to avoid making up their minds.

All this time we have been talking constitutional politics, of course. It is therefore necessary to define more precisely the ingredients of the open society. Since at this stage the issue is social and economic, we must ask which elements of economic organization are constituent parts of the open society and which others can be left to normal politics. Capitalism has often been defined in this context. Most definitions contain three elements: *private actors* coordinate their economic activity through the *market* in order to achieve accumulation and *growth*. How much of this is a part of the definition of an open society?

The question is extraordinarily difficult to answer, but it is undoubtedly a legitimate subject of debate and we can have a go at it. Take property. John Locke and his contemporaries would have had no doubt that private property is a constitutional requirement. Indeed, it probably is, though that does not mean that all property has to be private. State-owned railways are perfectly compatible with the open society. The key is that private property must be available as an option and it must be protected. Then there is the market. It has many implications, some constitutional and some not. Without legally protected contracts there can be no market; this is a constitutional need. Monopolies restrict the market, though this raises, even apart from the railways, the question of "natural monopolies" – for example, of air and of water. It is a constitutional condition of the open society that the generalization of monopolies be prevented. The burden of proof must always be on the defender of monopoly rather than on the advocate of pluralism and competition. Further, accumulation and growth. One ancient open society, Great Britain, has experienced many decades of indifferent or even "negative" growth without becoming illiberal. One can understand those who worry that economic growth may have become an almost constitutional postulate in a number of countries. Harold James had made the point for Germany, where "economic advance" has only too often in the last two centuries appeared to be the purpose "without which the nation could not exist." The constitutional requirement in this respect probably lies with the availability of incentives.

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Freedom to choose one's profession, freedom of movement, and arguably, limits to the progression of taxation belong in this category.

This is to say that neither demand management à la Keynes nor social security à la Beveridge is constitutionally incompatible with an open society. Indeed, many economic patterns which no textbook would describe as capitalist exist in democracies. The Japanese economy is hardly capitalist, with its large companies and their organized relations within the Ministry of International Trade and Industry. In Germany the role of the big banks, and of an informal network of major employers and trade unionists, coupled with codetermination and a highly developed welfare state, is hardly compatible with the publicly professed market economy. Sweden is in no strict sense a capitalist country. Yet these and others with their own idiosyncrasies are – with reservations in the case of Japan – open societies. The constitutional prerequisites of democracy are present.

The examples suggest an answer to your questions (and to the Utopian visions of the Swiss author whom, for the sake of clarity, I have perhaps treated a little harshly). There do exist aspects of economic order which belong to the constitution of liberty. They are, as it were, nonnegotiable. In your own country, as in others under Communist domination, some of them were absent. There was no law of monopoly. There was instead a near-total state monopoly. Private property was absent or severely restricted. Basic economic freedoms were missing. Without any "intercultural dialogue" aimed at compromise, and with a mishmash of systems, these missing elements of the open society will have to be established if liberty is to stay. Like the common language which we speak again, such elements are neither East nor West nor Central European, but universal prerequisites of freedom.

Then there is normal politics. If you want your country to be not only a home of free speech and political choice, but also a place of prosperity and economic opportunity, I strongly recommend many of the liberal policies which your courageous Minister of Finance Balcerowicz – or his Czech counterpart Vaclav Klaus, and some others elsewhere – are pursuing. Some elements of this policy border on the constitutional, but most are the legitimate subject of political debate and therefore of divergent views. American-style capitalism is only one way forward; few countries anywhere in the world have opted for it. Britain may have displayed some similar traits in an earlier phase of modern economic development, but the two reformers whom I like to quote, Keynes and Beveridge, were after all British, and of Keynes it has been said that he saved capitalism by destroying it. The economic structures of France and Germany, of Italy and Spain, of the Netherlands and Sweden, are different in dozens of significant respects. There is no Central European model; there are as many models as there are countries.

Thus, the notion of a third, or middle way is not only wrong in theory

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because it arouses the totalitarian potential of all Utopias; it is also wrong in practice. In constitutional terms, there are only two ways: we have to choose between systems and the open society. In terms of normal politics there are a hundred ways, and we can forever learn from one another in framing our own – your own, my own, everybody's, or at least every country's own – pattern of economic and social progress. None of these patterns is a model for others, let alone a system. Reality is infinitely varied. It may be a nightmare for the conceptual purist, but this must not mislead us into elevating it to a system. As long as the constitution of liberty is safe and sound, real people thrive in a real world for which all tidy concepts are inappropriate.

One other point needs to be made, although it is painful. The Swiss author rightly warned against arrogance on the part of those of us who were fortunate enough to live in conditions of liberty and prosperity while your people were suffering the leaden hand of *nomenklatura* socialism. His laudable compassion led him, as it does many others, to demand that the "achievements" of forty years of socialism be preserved even as its errors are undone. But what are these achievements? In terms of constitutional politics, I am afraid that I cannot see any. The much-quoted social rights embodied in your constitutions are not worth the paper on which they are written. No constitutional "right to work" can prevent unemployment; all it does is to discredit the constitution because it promises something which no judge can provide. A policy of full employment may rank high among the priorities of normal politics, but an article in the constitution is no substitute for it. (The right not to work is a more plausible candidate for constitutional guarantee, because it protects people against forced labor.) Nor can I see much in the field of normal politics that one would wish to preserve in the formerly socialist countries.

Something else remains, on which you placed great emphasis in our conversation. It has to do with the deep sense of loss felt by some in the post-Communist world because it appears that a style of life is irretrievably passing away which had much to recommend it. It was a less hectic style than that of the "capitalist" West, more sociable, more concerned with cultural values than the materialistic hedonism of the consumer society permits. You were quite specific on this point. It was right, you said, to subsidize good films rather than rent out video porn, indeed to make sure that inexpensive books of value (you said "classical" books) are available to everybody. I appreciate your intentions but cannot follow your conclusions. To some extent people's predilection for culture in totalitarian regimes is a substitute for other desires, whose fulfillment they are denied. Once the pressure lifts, they go for tabloids and hamburgers and dishwashers and shiny motorcycles and holidays on the Costa Brava. It would be nice if some of the less shallow values could be preserved, but it is hard to see how this can be done. I suspect that even if

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your government continued to subsidize "good" films and "classical" books, people will prefer to see cheap romance and read trash, or no longer read at all.

The reason is simple, and important in this context. As one looks at our world from a distance, one would like to see the objectives in which one believes, achieved directly and without detour or distraction. Perhaps what you call Social Democracy is an example of such an objective. But short of the horror of a "benevolent" dictatorship, this is not the way the world works. At least open societies do not work that way. Whether we like it or not, the pendulum swing from one side to the other – and it need not swing all the way from one extreme to the other – is the more likely rhythm of change. After the victory of Social Democracy in the OECD world, people wanted a new splurge of individualism, of innovation and initiative, and of consumerism. They elected Margaret Thatcher prime minister of Britain, and Ronald Reagan president of the United States, and even their "socialist" leaders such as the prime ministers of Spain and Australia and New Zealand turned out to be what some called "left Thatcherites."

Now, at the beginning of the 1990s, the time may have come for us to turn back from the provisions party to the entitlements party, that is, from obsession with economic growth to recognition of the requirements of citizenship. Even the Republican president of the United States has promised a "kinder, gentler America," and in Europe the change of mood is unmistakable.

At the same time, it would not be surprising if your compatriots and your neighbors want to have their share of Western individualism, including consumerism and all that, before they remember the social needs of those who will be left behind. Some may regret this, but it is the price you pay for decades of glum and gray collectivism. I wish you well in your attempt to stem the tide of trash and glitter, but I suspect that it will sweep you away. Yours will be a minority position for a while, and as you undoubtedly perceive, I do not feel very sorry for you. At least I do not feel sorry as long as the swing of the pendulum remains contained by the limits of the open society. In practice, this means that it must be possible to vote Balcerowicz out of office (not too soon, I hope; in eight years' time perhaps) and replace him by a more Social Democratic politician.

This takes me back again to your question of political parties and their social bases. Who is going to support what in the years to come? What political structures are going to emerge from the collapse of the Communist monopoly? The question has vexing dimensions, for while it it clear that the party systems of the European democracies, and of North America for that matter, would sit uneasily on the post-Communist countries, your predicament reminds us of the fact that our own parties are out of date and out of tune with the times. The German experience has made the point perfectly.

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While West German parties have gone to great lengths and expense to restructure the numerous East German movements and sects along their lines, no fewer than thirteen groupings are represented in the freely elected parliament, and in many cases it is difficult to make sense of them either in terms of their programs or their electoral support.

One wonders whether, if we were in your position and had to build our party structures in the old democracies from scratch, the same would happen here. Along with class conflict, the two-party system has crumbled. Everywhere new groups seek a place among the old. Many of these are social movements, such as the Greens, or one-issue parties, like the Five-Eighths Party in Luxembourg (which demands that a retirement pension be five-eighths of a person's final income). Some try to cut across traditional divisions, such as the Alliance in Britain, now called the Social and Liberal Democrats. In the United States it has been observed that politics is now conducted by 536 entrepreneurs: 435 representatives, 100 senators, and one president. (The cynic might add that members of the House have a "turnover" of $1 million per election, members of the Senate $10 million, and the president $100 million.) You were thus quite right to raise the question of party after class, and I am not sure that my answer will satisfy you.

In your country, of course, as in others in the post-Communist world, you still have some way to go in order to join the great Social Democratic consensus. I suspect that if developments in East Central Europe remain undisturbed from outside, or from antidemocratic forces within, the pendulum of normal politics will have to swing once in the liberal and once in the social direction before you feel that you have made it. The liberal direction means of course Balcerowicz if not Friedman (though I hope not Hayek); it involves the jump-start of economies whose batteries have been low for a very long time, with I hope the more fortunate countries of Europe and North America providing the lead with the necessary energy. The next steps can be taken in a variety of ways; *perestroika* too has as many variants as there are countries and organized views within them. They range from monetary union in Germany to massive privatization in Hungary. All of these steps will – and should – be taken as a part of the initial momentum of constitutional change, that is, before there are fully formed political parties. Opposition to this process is bound to arise, and it will be about the social cost of economic growth. At some point, in four or even eight years' time (how I hope that you will have this time for reform which must seem endless and threatening now!), other groups will take over. They may even be called Social Democrats.

All the while, however, our own problem will be a lingering reality for you as well. Here the forces for change are fragmented and often weak. On the one hand, the place of class has been taken by what some have called "disparities of realms of life." This means that all of us have certain interests

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in common in one of our "realms of life," such as the integrity of the physical environment, whereas we may have divergent interests in other "realms of life," such as the distribution of wealth. Thus, trade unionists and employers can both be "green" at times, but they remain on opposite sides of the table when it comes to wage settlements. Special interests, and social movements built around them, take the place of political parties; individuals no longer "belong" to one group which combines most of their concerns, but they switch allegiances depending on the priority of one or another theme at different times. We have not yet invented institutions to accommodate this change. Not only parties but parliaments too were built around the idea of the class struggle, with the "right" and the "left" in their respective places if not on opposite sides. In any case, as you sit down to think about the rules of the game of your political process, you will wish to take the facts of conflict after class into account. Here too *The Federalist Papers* are relevant, not least because the United States Constitution was never constructed or applied to accommodate class cleavages in the European way.

The other force for change is even more problematic, and you may not like it at all. It consists of active minorities of people who have thought about things and have advice to give to those who are in a position to act on such advice. You probably do not regard yourself as an intellectual, but I am one. I can therefore see that the demise of socialism not only has many practical consequences and raises questions such as those which you asked, but it also threatens the very existence of a group which has played a major role in the recent history of Europe. Perhaps intellectuals are not a group; they are a gaggle, a motley assortment, a category at best, but many of them have had a special affinity to socialism. Socialism was an intellectual invention, from Saint-Simon to Lassalle, from Marx to Gramsci, and through the hundreds of byways of Marxism which are now all ending in the sewers of discarded history.

One influential posture of intellectuals in Europe over the last hundred years had three ingredients. (In a halfhearted way they are still present among the bureaucratized intelligentsia in the universities and the media.) One was the outright rejection of present conditions as endemically rotten and incapable of repair. The second was a more or less elaborate vision of a totally different world in which the ills of reality are remedied. And the third was a great sense of certainty about both the rejection and the vision. Alienation, Utopia, and dogmatism do not form a very attractive triad, though it is one which leads almost naturally to versions of socialism which are not of the Social Democratic variety.

I say this without any sense of delight or superiority. After all, I grew up in this world, and have feelings of friendship for some of those who manage to combine their socialist certainties with a personal decency which belies their creed. One or two have even turned out to be reliable "constitutional

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patriots" without abandoning their claims to the rejection of the present and to a Utopian future. I feel much more alien among the new "intellectuals" of the right, nobably among those who have embraced an unconditional and often vicious defense of Thatcherism with the same total devotion they once gave to socialism and even Communism. It is true that in recent years the unusual has happened, and *der Geist weht rechts*, creative minds have espoused right-wing causes. Some of these are of lasting importance. While John Rawls may survive Robert Nozick and others who were prepared to shed "justice as fairness" in favor of the "minimal state," public-choice theorists and constitutional economists have a great deal to offer when it comes to the issues with which I am dealing in this letter. But having said that, there remain the many for whom the demise of socialism means that a chasm has opened up, a great vacuum which is as disconcerting emotionally as it is intellectually. They no longer know where to go, and like the Italian Communist Party (of blessed memory) or the magazine *Marxism Today* in Britain, they combine a courageous preparedness for change with a remarkable confusion of ideas.

Some of these doubly homeless intellectuals – "free-floating" in any case and now robbed of their socialist mental home as well – try to keep a dream of some "real" socialism alive. They claim that none of the really existing versions had anything to do with the real thing; indeed, they were all betrayals of the true socialist ideal. They speak of "socialism with a human face," but the attempt is pathetic and will not lead anywhere. Kjell-Olof Feldt, a Social Democrat and former Swedish minister of finance, has put it succinctly: "If it is that difficult to give a concept a human face, I want nothing to do with it." I would recommend to those who still cannot get socialism out of their minds an intellectual tradition which is admittedly less impressive in numbers, but includes some upright individuals who have proved immune to the temptations of dogma and Utopian fantasies when these were strong. Karl Popper belongs squarely in this tradition. So does Raymond Aron, and perhaps Norberto Bobbio. John Maynard Keynes and William Beveridge have a place in this gallery. Max Weber can be found in it despite his early forays into nationalist pastures. The authors of *The Federalist Papers* – Alexander Hamilton, John Jay, and James Madison – were not tempted by tyranny, and likewise belong in this tradition (although I wonder what they would have said about being called intellectuals). And there are others, fortunately. They are all children of Kant, and of Hume and Locke before him, but emphatically not of Hegel or even of Rousseau. They are passionate defenders of the open society and at the same time committed reformers. One would be hard-pressed to place them on the left-right spectrum which the French Revolution has bequeathed us. Keynes put it well. He could not be a conservative – "I should not be amused or excited or edified." He could not be a socialist because he worried about "the party which hates existing institutions and believes that great good will result merely from overthrowing

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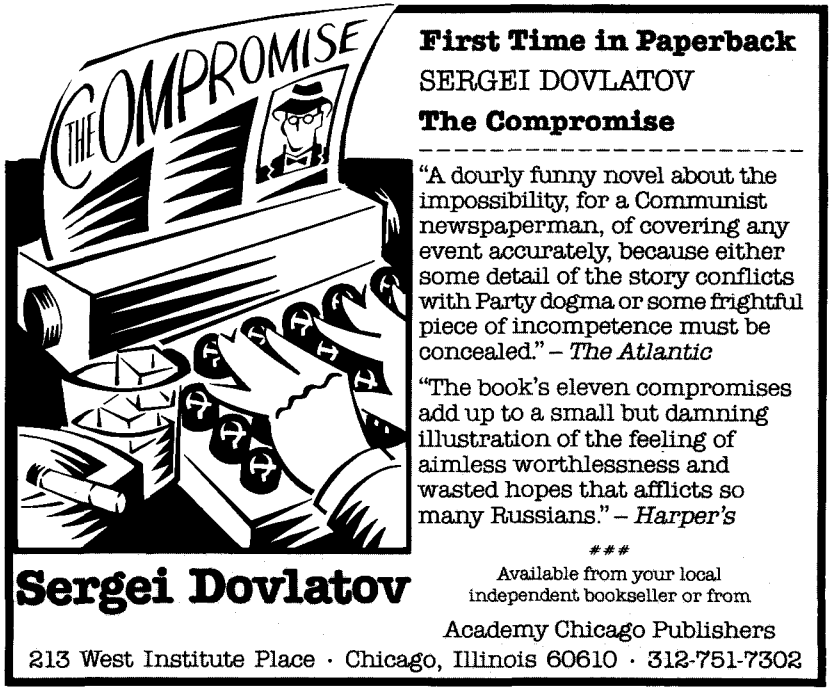
them." Rather, he wrote, "I incline to believe that the Liberal Party is still the best instrument of future progress – if only it had strong leadership and the right programme." Today the liberal *party* is just as likely to be a minority of active reformers who believe in the constitution of liberty.

All this is in some sense, by the way, more to amuse you than to answer your questions. Perhaps it helps to explain why I am so skeptical about Social Democracy, and also about the third way. My own liberal position is that of a constitutional liberalism in which the realm of normal politics advocates radical reform. I want to see entitlements of citizenship raised as well as the spirit of innovation and entrepreneurship aroused. Naturally, I believe that this is a helpful position both in your predicament and in ours. Communism has collapsed; Social Democracy is exhausted. We may have to live for some time with the shells of yesterday's politics, whatever their names may be. Thus, you will probably adopt the labels of political parties familiar from the older democracies. But the old politics is spent. Constitutional liberalism and social reform need to build a new alliance. This is neither just your problem nor merely ours; it is a European problem which we have to resolve together.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Rivka Bar-Yosef

AN ISRAELI ON ISRAEL

Edith Kurzweil: I want to welcome you and to introduce my friend and guest, Rivka Bar-Yosef. She hardly needs an introduction. However, to those of you who do not know her, she is one of the most distinguished Israeli sociologists, has been on many delegations of the Labor government, and for years was the representative to the International Labor Organization. She has written widely on Israeli social problems, labor relations, and women's issues.

Rivka Bar-Yosef: I have doubts about what I can tell you, because so many Americans think they know everything about Israel, more than the Israelis, and then offer quick solutions to all our problems. But because you asked me to talk about how I feel about Israeli society, I decided to break down the major problems into secondary ones. In other words, I shall try to "disaggregate" them, as the economists would say.

Undoubtedly, Israel now is in turbulence but not just because of the Intifada, so I won't talk much about it. The turmoil is due to problems that existed from the very beginning of the State of Israel. Everything was new. Then, the problems were ignored. Israelis thought that things would arrange themselves, that with time solutions somehow would develop. But in certain areas this hasn't happened, although some things are resolving themselves.

Take, for example, what is called the ethnic conflict, which only a few years ago was thought to be the gap between Sephardim and non-Sephardim. This conflict has not disappeared, but it's smoothing out. The Sephardim have a high rate of mobility, and many of them have entered politics. If you look at the Knesset, you probably cannot recognize them, but among the outstanding Knesset members, not the back-benchers, there are Iraquis, Moroccans, Tunisians: some of the very well-to-do and very newly well-to-do are Sephardim. So while there still is poverty among them, and a higher rate of school drop-outs, etcetera, there is also a high rate of intermarriage. This is a problem that is resolving itself, while others now are boiling. Until recently, public opinion was not organized, but now groups and protest movements are organized – which is both positive and dangerous. People are fed up with all kinds of things; they are clamoring for change, but because public movements are unable to provide rapid changes, it's easy to propose all sorts of miracle cures. People get caught up in slogans which may be dangerous. Since some problems are not amenable to quick solutions, there is a danger that demagogues will influence these popular movements, ask for cosmetic solutions that, when you examine them, would turn out badly. Politicians, however, are afraid that in elections they have have to respond to

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Editor's Note: This discussion took place on June 6, 1990, in New York City.

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popular demands. So they don't really promise anything, but they are quick to say that they approve of such solutions and don't react in a well thought-out way.

One of these problems concerns the kind of democratic system Israel should have. I still don't know why we have one hundred and twenty representatives. Our party system and our electoral system were taken over from the time of the Zionist parties, within the Histadrut, the General Federation of Labor, and outside it. For a time, this system worked, and we believed that it was the best one. It turned out not to work, or to work badly. I shall mention three of the questions related to this issue. These are being discussed now, and popular movements are pushing to resolve them.

First, there is the question of the constitution. Israel does not have a constitution because when the first government tried to formulate one, it became clear that the type of constitution desirable for a secular democratic society would not be acceptable to the religious parties. There were disputes about some clauses of human rights, the equality of the sexes and the primacy of the legislative and judicial authority of the Knesset and the secular courts versus the authority of the religious establishment. Ben-Gurion preferred national consensus to a constitution and proposed a "Declaration of Independence" which includes general statements of basic values, such as "nondiscrimination because of race, religion, or sex." This, indeed, was unanimously accepted. At the same time the partial autonomy of the religious establishments of all the religious denominations, guaranteed first by the Turkish and later by the British rulers of the country, was maintained. With few restrictions, such as the prohibition of polygamy and child marriage, the whole area of personal status was left in the hands of religious courts. The hiatus left by the lack of a constitution is somewhat filled by a series of basic laws. As in many new countries the legal system is built step by step. Not having a constitution means that basic values are inferred only, but there can be no reference to a formal document which constitutes a leading and controlling force. A group of law professors decided that having a constitution would provide a miraculous cure for the legal dilemmas of Israel. A constitution might be helpful if and when the political power balance is changed. At present the situation is similar to that at the beginning of the state. If the constitution is one accepted by the religious parties, who now have an even stronger hold, then it will include a clause maintaining the dual judicial system, and there will not be accorded equal rights to women or to the various non-orthodox Jewish movements. This type of constitution would not enjoy the approval of the secular population. There is a second aspect of the secular-religious controversy. Autonomous religious courts are considered by the non-Jewish religious minorities as their unalienable rights enjoyed from before the existence of the state of Israel. I doubt whether they can be taken away peacefully now. A new constitution, however formulated, would not be

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acceptable to large sections of the population. So the constitution proposed by a group of law professors would not be very different from what we have now, although it would have a constitutional status. Personally, I think we're better off without a constitution than one that would legitimize this abnormal situation.

The religious courts are basically antidemocratic. A democratic system enables the formulation of new laws and the elimination of old ones. But the religious system, Jewish, Moslem, or Christian, is based on the idea of sacredness of a tradition which is unchangeable in its essence. This means that the democratically elected Knesset, supposed to represent the will of the people, cannot fulfill its legislative function. There are some elementary contradictions between the basic citizenship rights presumably accorded to each Israeli citizen and the religious jurisdiction. Thus women cannot be judges in any of the religious courts. They can be and are members of the Supreme Court, of the highest military court, but they cannot judge in cases of divorce, or even appear as witnesses before a rabbinical court.

To solve the problem about democracy we must decide on what type of representational system to adopt. We now have extreme proportional representation: whoever has an idea can have a party, and go to elections. Only Romania with eighty-four parties has more than we do. We had twenty-four parties running for the Knesset, and in the Knesset there are representatives of seventeen parties. That's a very good representation of ideas, but it is not efficient. Two or three members of the Knesset can have a strong disproportional weight. Neither of the great blocks can form a government by itself, so these small parties can decide whether or not there is going to be a government. And because these small parties are aware of their power (much greater in the Knesset than among the population) they try to exploit the situation. So, when Shamir forms a government, a party of three people will have two ministers and one deputy minister. Three parties here and three parties there, each of them with its own ideology, with its own ideas on solving Israel's problems, cannot produce a clear-cut program. Each program always will have to compromise with one little party or another. We now have car stickers that say, "We are fed up with you," meaning the politicians as well as the current democratic system. This can easily be turned into saying that people are fed up with democracy.

Nobody says that we should stop being a representative democracy. But people are aware that the Knesset is unable to approve a change because Labor and Likud don't get together to change the electoral makeup, – from proportional representation to a different type of representation. or by raising the minimum of votes necessary for representation. As it is, we could have a hundred parties. It's probably far-fetched, but every one or two people in the Knesset could form a party. And because the interests of the small parties are against change, it is difficult to bring it about. Likud and

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Labor don't propose such a change because each one hopes to form a government with the help of the small parties.

Another proposal – also invented by a professor of law – is for a presidential system. America has a presidential system, so the populists argue that the prime minister should be chosen by the people, by direct vote. They assume that then he would have the power to appoint his cabinet and thus create an efficient government. But nowhere in the world is a prime minister elected directly by the people. Israelis know that President Bush or Eisenhower were elected by the people of America, and they forget about the American electoral process. In this situation the real danger is that a charismatic, populist leader might capture the majority vote and become a sort of uncontrolled prime minister with his own cabinet. Personally, I cannot understand how some of our very intelligent Knesset members can push the notion of direct election – knowing the Israeli situation. In such a situation, I wouldn't want him to have the power to appoint his own cabinet and government. Because these are very real problems it's not very clear what can be done. I think that the most rational thing is for people such as academics and politicians to try to work out some kind of system that would fit the Israeli situation and would have a good chance of being accepted. I am not at all sure how this will happen, but I think that a change in the system will come.

Because of the political stalemate all sorts of political matters cannot be settled, either by the parties or the Knesset. So for the first time since Israel's existence, the Supreme Court is taking over. In a way, it has taken over what used to be the functions of the Knesset. For example, it rules on whether certain party manipulations are or are not legal. It also is expected to decide whether a member of the Knesset elected on a party ballot may take his mandate to another party. In America, a Democrat can vote any way he wants because he was elected personally. His responsibility or accountability is to his electors. In Israel, representatives are not elected personally but represent a party. In several instances, an individual changed parties and took his mandate along – thereby changing the balance of power. The question is whether legally a mandate is the member's private property or not. Peres, for example, had formed a sixty-one person government when, at the last minute, two members of one party changed over to the Likud. (This happened on the morning he went to the Knesset to present his government.) Thus he did not have a majority. The question (apart from the moral issue) is a purely democratic one about the electoral system. If this situation were changed, our political arena would change as well. Another Israeli debate questions the so-called politicization of the Supreme Court. Opinions vary. Some say the Supreme Court should not intervene, and others believe it must act as a sort of guardian, if not of the constitution then of the proper functioning of the political institutions.

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The second, very acute, and difficult problem concerns the relationship between the state and the religion. Outsiders talk about separating Church and state. We don't have a "church." We have as many "churches" as religious political parties. However, there are three main questions: What is the status of religion in Israel? Do we have a Jewish state in the religious sense? And if we do, what is the status of specific rituals and customs?

Some of these problems existed from the very beginning. For example, in 1948, there was a debate about whether the official day of rest should be Saturday or not. Some were against it because Israel is a secular country, but they were outvoted. This decision said something about allegiance, about loyalty to the Jewish religion. And there were other decisions, such as legislating against pork and against raising and selling pigs. Is that part of something the state must have a stand on? What does it mean that Shabbat is the official rest day? Although I'm secular, I don't think that one can separate state and religion, essentially because the roots of Jewish culture are so interwoven with religion, with the Bible and the Talmud. Nobody wants to discard the Talmud as a cultural heritage, it's very rich. In Israel, we don't even know what it means to be "secular." Very few people are entirely secular; there are gradations of what it means to be secular or nonsecular. One study found that people are holding onto something. And our relationship with Diaspora Judaism – one of our important links – is religious. Therefore, religion cannot be disregarded. Moreover, I don't think that there are many Christian countries where religion does not have a certain status.

Another problem is the relationship of the state to the religious establishment. In forty years this establishment became much more powerful than it was in the beginning, due to the autonomy of the judiciary and of religious legislation, and to the economic basis it achieved. Some groups became more organized and get ongoing support. And the stronger a religious establishment grew the stronger its vested interest: people are living off this establishment; money and power are involved; and there is support from outside. For the first time, the Lubavicher from Brooklyn is becoming a political power in Israel. It's really fantastic, but when he gives an order, part of the religious establishment in Israel accepts it. Those who are in the Lubavicher Yeshiva don't go into the army. But the Lubavicher is the one who says that the West Bank is part of Israel, so that everybody else has to go into the army and keep the West Bank. Before the whole debate about the new government, some Israelis phoned the Lubavicher to ask whether the religious establishment should support the Labor party. Thus we have the influence of the American goverment, of the American secular Jewish institution, and of the Lubavicher. But they don't agree with each other. Anyway, we have a strong religious establishement that is difficult to dismantle.

To have a religious establishment means that they control schools; that

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they are connected to some of the religious customs such as the Kashrut (the Kosher), which means that thousands of people are supervising the Kashrut in hotels, in the army. The religious establishment always asks for more. There are judges, called Dayanim, who are part of the religious courts, and thus have functions within the State. And there is the independent religious establishment which influences its followers. It is called the Moetset Gdoleh Ha'Torah, the Supreme Establishment of the Aguda – a non-elected group of Wise Men. But these Wise Men decide secular questions. Years ago they had no real power.

Now I come to the third problem linking religion with politics. We always had religious parties, but they used to be comfortable partners for government: they wanted money for religious schools and did not have a political agenda. They went with the Labor Party, without Labor ideology, and restricted themselves to religious matters. But during the last decade the religious parties became political, especially on the question of the West Bank, of settlements. After they entered into the political debate they made more and more political demands. While before, they might settle for the Ministry of Education or the Ministry of Religion, now they want the Ministry of Housing - to provide not only for the settlements but also for religious neighborhoods. There is a campaign to "conquer" neighborhoods, not in the West Bank, but in Jerusalem, around Jerusalem, so that highways will not run through these neighborhoods – because no one should travel on Shabbat.

When any of the parties do not answer a political question before asking its Wise Men or the Lubavicher, the religious establishment is dealing with more than religion – with major national questions. Yet these people are detached from present-day Israeli society: they find answers in Ha'Lakha. As you know, everyone can find an answer in Ha'Lakha but it has to be interpreted. Now, it is interpreted by an ultra-conservative elected religious establishment that tries to control political parties elected to the Knesset.

This is a rather absurd situation that militates against the efficient functioning of the Knesset. During recent months, Israelis sometimes thought of this absurd situation as a joke, because everybody saw the paradox. I don't know how this problem can be solved, given that we are dealing with emotional problems, with the vested interest of an establishment, and with the political interest of coalitions. When Peres tried to form a government he immediately tried a coalition with one of the more orthodox religious parties that is not extremely chauvinistic. Thus you would have had a Labor Party in a coalition government with left-wing Labor, and with an ultra-orthodox traditional religious party. They were ready to enter the coalition because they tend to be antimilitaristic and against the idea of the state. But there are other religious parties on the other side of the government that could possibly form a coalition. So something has to change.

Moreover, because the religious establishment now holds some power

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such as the Kashrut, they instituted licenses for Kashrut. This means that each hotel needs to have such a license in order to cater to the tourist industry: many Jews who eat ham and eggs outside Israel still may want to go to a kosher hotel. But the rabbinate who gives the license uses the Kashrut for all sorts of interference. For example, some feminists came to a conference and wanted to take a Torah from a hotel to the Wall. The hotel people asked them not to, because the rabbinate would revoke their Kashrut license. This is how the question of kosher food became a political power base. In a case brought to the Supreme Court the Court ruled that Kashrut problems are relevant to food alone. Nevertheless, it remains to be seen how the religious establishment will respond.

I could go on, but I'll stop. I did not talk about the problems of security and peace, or about the question of Russian emigrés, because you hear so much about them. We can discuss them, however, if you would like to. Thank you.

EK: Thank you very much for a most informative talk, Rivka.

RB-J: I hope I told you something that you didn't know. Because usually you know everything.

EK: William, do you want to moderate?

William Phillips: All right.

Marjorie Iseman: I wonder if you think that the Russian immigrants will change the balance of the parties?

RB-J: Yes. In the first group of immigrants, many were religious or became religious. They had some special ideas about Israel, sort of messianic expectations. The recent migration is not different from migrations to America. They come to Israel because they want to get out of Russia, to have opportunities to feel free. I don't know how many will stay in Israel. I hope the majority, but some will leave; I can understand them. Many don't have any formal links to Judaism; they don't know about it. They are the second or third generation after the Revolution, educated in a Communist country although they are not Communist. They are intelligent and eager to succeed; they are ready to learn Hebrew and are very curious. If it's true, as predicted, that during the next year and a half one hundred thousand will come, the balance of power could change. Nobody knows how they will vote. But we already see that they are not predominantly right-wing nor predominantly religious. They probably will be spread out over the political spectrum. Compared to former waves of immigration, they organize themselves quickly. It always takes time until a group of immigrants organizes itself in order to represent its interests. The old-timers of Russian origin received them immediately and are the first layer of leadership. But I don't think this leadership will stay in power very long: they're a different generation and will ask for their own rights. They also feel that they brought something to Israeli society.

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The new immigrants are mainly interested in housing, in education, and in integrating into Israeli society. Yes, they could change both the party balance and the composition of the society. When they first arrived people predicted a conflict between the Russian immigrants and the Sephardim, that the Sephardim would feel that they would take away some of their jobs. That was true in the beginning, but to everybody's surpprise things changed. The Sephardim were mobilized to receive the Russian immigrants; they had discussion groups and social groups. Maybe because the Sephardim are getting integrated, they now accept the new immigrants.

The discussions about occupied territories and the settlements are nonsensical. Nobody is settled. People are given the choice to find places where they want to settle. After that the Sokhnut and the government either buy them flats or give them money. It's part of the bureaucratic process. Very few of the Russians want to settle in "occupied territories." Israelis don't restrict people from living where they choose, but there are no special incentives to settle there. They mostly avoid the territories because they are afraid that it is temporary and because they are attracted by the big urban centers – Haifa, Tel Aviv. So I think that the whole question revolves not around the West Bank but around Jerusalem. The new immigrants do settle in Jerusalem and strengthen its Jewish character.

Lionel Abel: I thought that your talk was fascinating, but there were two things I didn't understand. I don't see why the new electoral system wouldn't solve some of the political problems you brought up. I always thought that the reason the new electoral system was proposed was to deal with the problem posed by the small religious parties. I don't see why a new electoral system wouldn't do so. The other thing I didn't understand is why there should not be a presidential system based on an imitation of the American system because we do have, along with the Presidency, a balance of power between the judiciary, the President, and Congress. In that case the fear of Sharon becoming dictator would be dissipated.

RB-J: I don't think that any system can be transplanted from one country to another and probably not from a large country like the United Sates to a small country like ours. The American system is much more complicated than what some Israelis are proposing for Israel. You have two Houses, you have states with a certain autonomy, a federal government, and you have a system of change through elections. As a matter of fact, you have elections all the time. And there are governors, and a whole system of checks and balances, which was not built up in one day. All this cannot be transplanted. We don't have states, we don't have governors. We have one Knesset, one House. And the American President is not elected by popular vote; he has to start as a candidate. So I don't think it is possible.

LA: It is possible. I think it is possible.

RB-J: Then why do you have primaries?

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LA: I don't see that.
RB-J: I don't want to get into technicalities. I say only that the American system cannot be transplanted as is. I don't say that it is impossible to have a presidential system in Israel, but there should be proper checks and balances. What seems to be catching the popular fantasy today is something which does not take the questions of checks and balances into account. I am not afraid of a new system – only of a populist solution which is not a solution. To your second point. Yes, something has to change. However, everybody expects a new system to solve at least part of the problems. But it is not easy to change a whole system. Suppose it's changed and doesn't work. That is when disappointment sets in, and disenchantment with democracy. We already hear some voices about getting a strong person. That is where the danger lies. A changed system may deal with some of the small parties, not with all of them.
Daphne Merkin: I just wanted to ask you two questions about the religious issue which you sort of glossed over, why during the last decade the accommodation of the religious parties, of the religious point of view, has been so much stronger. Is it only political expediency? To me it seems to reflect a bigger kind of shift in the country, not merely that the religious parties have been sort of magically empowered in the last ten years. It's a complex interworking of things. Maybe I misunderstood that.

The other question I ask as someone lapsed from an orthodox background. You kept referring to the religious establishment in rather monolithic terms, as ultraconservative. Do you as a secular Jew, like many Israeli secular Jews, conflate all the orthodox, right orthodox, left orthodox, into the ultraconservative religious establishment, and if you don't, what has happened to the so-called moderate end – those who observe the Shabbat? Not everyone sits in B'nai Brak. You described these neighborhoods primarily in Jerusalem, you said there are neighborhoods now that are trying to enact legislation, but those are very specific, ultra-rightist neighborhoods within the larger orthodox Jewish community in Israel. What has happened to the moderate influence, how come you haven't referred to it? Does it not exist, is it invisible? Do secular Israelis refuse to recognize it?
RB-J: I should start with the last point. In Israel the moderates did not develop a strong religious organizational voice. In the last election there was a small liberal, humanistic religious group. They did not get into the Knesset because they did not have enough votes. There are more moderate and less moderate groups. It is interesting that the most orthodox are the least chauvinistic among the religious. Others who may be moderate as to religion, like the Misrachi, are politically more right-wing. There also is enormous pressure inside the religious community – among the religious establishments. Often, the less extreme are on the defensive. They agree that the most orthodox are the representatives of religion, so they become more

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traditionally oriented. There is enormous pressure within the religious community to become more religious. I as a secular, along with many of the seculars, always look toward the liberal reform community. But as long as there isn't going to be a strong American *aliyah* there won't be a reform community. The reform community is alien to the Israelis. From America we are getting the extremely religious, like Kahane and Lubavicher. Other Americans are coming and the reform community is growing, but very slowly.

There is a sort of fashion to become religious, not in very large numbers, but there has been a sort of *chuvah* to become more religious, especially by some people who were well-known – some bohemians, some artists who tried out everything including drugs and were looking to find themselves. After that they went to the yeshiva.

DM: You make it sound worse than drugs.

RB-J: No, no.

DM: But it seems to me the particular bias . . .

RB-J: They were very well-known, and that made the difference. The Sephardim were never really secular, they were traditional, not part of the religious establishment. But since their integration into society, they are entering more and more into the political arena. That also means that religiosity has received political expressions. So they strengthened the political parties. The religious political parties in the past were purely Ashkenazis; in this election for the first time there was a Sephardic right-wing religious political party.

DM: Zevulun Hammer was not Sephardic?

RB-J: No, Zevulun Hammer is Ashkenazi, Israeli Ashkenazi. No, Deri, Peretz, are coming up from the Sephardics. Hammer is not. He was ready to go with the Labor party but could not because the religious establishment would not allow it. So I don't think that I look upon them as all of one color, but it's becoming more of one color. There is less differentiation in ideologies, the differentiation remains on the political level.

Cynthia Epstein: Maybe this was a conversation we had several years ago in Israel, when you were pointing out that part of the problem was this sort of tolerance for the religious parties on the part of secular Israelis, particularly with reference to the inequalities in regard to women; the maintenance of religious courts that had jurisdiction over the domestic sphere and whatever fallout came from that. Do you feel that that's continuing in the same way and that the secular affirmation of the rights of the religious groups is part of the problem? Do they still have dominance in that sphere, or some disgruntlement?

RB-J: There is a sort of double-bind, because very few among the seculars would like to have an Israeli society where there is no sign of Jewish religion. In a study I did I had a long list of all kinds of *mitzvot*, and I asked people

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who defined themselves as nonreligious what they were keeping. Less than one percent did not keep anything.

Herbert Ferber: How does the economic situation affect the religious or political situation: Is it overriding or not? I know that there is a severe economic problem, and in most countries economic problems are extremely important.

RB-J: There is an economic problem. But the standard of living is rising all the time. Israelis say they are richer and richer; their state is poorer and poorer. There is unemployment, but less than in many European countries. The main problem is the distribution of unemployment: not much of it in the big cities but more on the periphery. Inflation was reduced, but it still exists. This year it will be around seventeen to twenty percent. This is a big achievement because we had four hundred percent inflation. But the long expected economic growth is not coming. There is a lot of talk of how severe the economic situation is. It might be severe on the abstract level, but it is not felt except by the unemployed. Seven hundred thousand Israelis are taking summer trips abroad this year.

Herbert Ferber: So it doesn't affect the political situation?

RB-J: No. It does affect unemployment, but it does not affect voting for a specific party. There are all kinds of suggestions about what should be done, but economics are not really a party program, and therefore will not affect how people vote, not yet.

Barbara Solomon: You mentioned the sort of eternal kibbitzing of Americans over Israel and you explained how that affects the religious people. But what about the number of Americans writing on Israel, be it from the right or the left, how is that perceived in Israel: Is it a negative thing? How do Israelis feel about this tremendous American expertise?

RB-J: Expertise in what?

BS: About advising Israel on what to do, that Americans are constantly advising Israelis. We can go the gamut from left to right. What effect does this have on Israel?

RB-J: Israelis have a feeling, I don't mean all Israelis, that because we live in a stressful situation, not only now but all the time, when people say you should do this and that, they should live in Israel and try it out. But there is a difference between American ideas about economics, which is much more acceptable, and politics. This is an emotional response, but it really causes many people not to listen to what the Americans are saying. Maybe they should.

It also depends on the party or the political context. For example, at a certain stage the peace movement was useful but then it had a boomerang effect: when they thought that the only way to solve the peace question was for the Americans to put pressure on the Israeli government. In Israel, that raised much antagonism. When it comes to the question of the PLO, for ex-

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ample, Israelis mainly feel that when you sit in your comfortable homes and don't get stones thrown at you and your cars are not burned, and there are no attacks on your beach, you somehow do not have the moral right to tell us what to do. But that's a controversial question, because if you are part of the same Jewish people, the Jewish nation, then you should have the right to say what you think about Israel. So it isn't an easy question, and it is an emotional one. When people think about it, they say that you can't ask the Americans to give money and not to give their opinion. Yet you can't expect the Israelis to sit down and ask the Americans what to do and then do it. The antangonism to the Lubavicher is an example: you very often hear, "Okay, but he's sitting in Brooklyn and then suggests that we should fight in the West Bank."

DM: But it's mostly the left in America that speaks up about Israel. The Lubavichers are the only vocal right-wing voice. And they certainly don't speak up about the territories. They don't sign petitions that appear in *The New York Times*.

RB-J: I am not talking about those who sign the petitions in *The New York Times*. People are very angry about that.

DM: They are very angry in Israel?

RB-J: Yes, very.

Deborah Rosenthal: You know, of course, that Americans feel the need to affect American foreign policy, which is implicated in Israel. It's also that American foreign policy is involved and that left-thinking Americans believe they should affect that policy.

RB-J: Okay, I said that it is a very complicated question. You said something else about loyalty to Israel. I talked about what is suggested to Israel. These are different issues. I don't think that all Israelis understand that American Jews are Americans. Many Israelis look upon American Jews as not really having the right to be Americans. And even the committed Zionists are Americans and see themselves as Americans, so as you say there is a question of American foreign policy. I don't know whether you can separate being an American and trying to influence American foreign policy from what you are telling the Israelis. But that's the problem of American Jews, of what it means to be Jewish, to be pro-Israeli, to be American. I don't think that we should give you advice on solving that problem. I don't think we understand it.

WP: One more question from the floor.

Elizabeth Dalton: You said earlier that you would say something about peace and the Intifada if someone asked you.

RB-J: That would be a long, long answer.

WP: It seems strange to have a meeting on Israel and not to talk about what everybody talks about.

RB-J: That's why I did not.

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WP: Peace, security, Intifada.
ED: A little bit of it.
RB-J: Okay. Everybody wants peace, so that is not the real question. But there are some basic problems which do not depend on that. First of all, what does peace mean? Peace with Egypt was an entirely different question from peace with the Palestinians. Who are the Palestinians we can talk to about peace? The PLO? There is no proof, or we cannot be sure that an agreement with the PLO would mean that peace is established. But let's say we have reached an agreement with the PLO the way we did with the Egyptian government. That government enforced the agreement. Aside from whether we should talk with the PLO, even those who want to do so have some doubts. The doubt is not about talking to the PLO, but about two other very important questions: What is Israel ready to give? And what is the PLO ready to give or to accept? We don't know what we are ready to give. It's very clear that no one will talk about Jerusalem. And I think that the PLO cannot afford not to talk about Jerusalem. So even if we go and talk with the PLO, there are some big questions built into this situation which make it very difficult. Jerusalem is one of them.

Secondly, let's say that we sit down and talk with the PLO. And suppose Mr. Arafat agrees and we agree, and they accept Jerusalem as the capital of Israel. I doubt that they can accept it, but let's say they do, and that they have a reduced Palestinian state, because Israel will not give back everything. Even if Arafat signs, there will be fifteen other factions who will continue the Intifada. We had a small-scale Intifada before 1948, after 1948, and this is what bothers all those who really want to talk with the PLO, with the Palestinians. We don't know how to talk, whom to talk to about peace or security. Israelis are not entirely stupid, they think about the Palestinian state: it will have many factions who will not like the borders, there will be border skirmishes, etcetera. Today the army deals with the Intifada. It's unpleasant and there are people dead and killed on both sides – not only Arabs but more Arabs than Jews. I don't think that American Jews would be much happier if there were more Jews killed than Arabs, though sometimes it seems so. It's an unpleasant situation, and believe me, we know how unpleasant it is. But now the army can be there and can do something. But if there is a Palestinian state and that Palestinian state will not openly attack Israel but will do what the Intifada does – and they can do that – then any retaliation by the Israeli army would be a *casus belli* for the Arab states. So this is why talking with the PLO is so difficult. I don't know if talks can go very far. Because nothing can be achieved, the talks will not lead anywhere. Nevertheless, I agree with you that something should be promoted, something should be done, but I'm not optimistic.
WP: Thank you Rivka, for a very sober and informative talk.

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Since Rivka Bar-Yosef talked, she has sent us the following letter about recent events in Israel:

September 4, 1990

I am sure you are interested in some of what is happening in Israel since I spoke at your meeting. First, the Russians are coming in increasing numbers, and we still don't know just how they will be integrated. In the meantime they are in Hebrew Ulpanim, but soon they will be part of the regular markets – in housing and labor. In general there is favorable feeling, but the arrival of large groups of people who claim special attention reactivates the consciousness of weaker groups which then vie for attention and demand permanent solutions for their problems – mainly of housing and income. It is amazing that there are relatively few "tent dwellers," which shows the considerable success of the Labor regime's housing policy. Nearly all the current problems result from the antiwelfare policy and the neglect in recent years. The government is moving too slowly in view of the seriousness of the difficulties arising from the mass influx of people – mainly from Russia, and possibly soon smaller numbers from Ethiopia.

The other topic is the Gulf crisis. It is interesting that this time there is much less popular anxiety than before the Six-Day War. There has been relatively little hoarding of food, so that there is no observable shortage of anything. Anyway, the holidays are coming, and Israelis always buy unbelievable quantities of food for the holidays. There was also private buying of gas masks, some political (mostly demagogic) discussion of whether or not there should be immediate distribution to households. But in the last πfew weeks, Israelis, with their remarkable resilience, have been busy discussing such local issues as whether the kindergartens should be open five or six days, whether the shekel will be devalued shortly, and the Israeli Watergate – the illegal tapping of the telephone conversation of the Chief of Police and of a journalist who wrote a series of articles on the presumably illegal distribution of funds by the Interior Minister to various charities headed by family and friends. For the last two days, the main topic is not whether Saddam Hussein or the Americans will attack, but whether the Solicitor General will or will not read the illegally-produced cassette which was sent anonymously to the police. The police are investigating charges against the Interior Minister who is Sephardi and Orthodox and the government representative of a relatively new Sephardi-Orthodox political party. The partisans of the minister, who presumably are the initiators of the tapping, try to discredit the police, and to insert a little flavor by hinting of a possible anti-Sephardi conspiracy. This in a nutshell is the best show in town, and how can Saddam imagine that he can compete with it? The Intifada is not finished, but for the moment it is much weaker. There is no sense in expending much

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energy and in taking risks when nobody pays any attention because the Gulf crisis captures the international media.

You see, everything is as usual – threats of war, fluctuating levels of anxiety, economic crises salted with one or two political scandals, a jazz festival in Eilat, the opening of a new building for contemporary art at the Israeli Museum, and lovely autumn days at last.

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Stanislaw Baranczak

POLAND, MAY 1990, AND BEYOND

Converting a bowl of fish soup back into an aquarium: this metaphor, whatever its origin, has become public domain nowadays for all those who try to tell us exactly how difficult it is going to be for the former East Bloc nations to switch to market economies and democratic political systems. If things were only as difficult as the metaphor portrays them! A former inhabitant of Eastern Europe such as myself feels a need for the gastronomic part of this simile to be rectified. Among dishes with fishy smells, it is not soup he would refer to as the object of comparison. If anything, life under Communist regimes resembled fish *aspic*.

You may argue that it makes no real difference to a piece of boiled fish fillet whether it floats in a soup or is stuck in its own congealed juices. Yet floating is, after all, some kind of motion, whereas the chief quality of life under Communism was precisely that it stood still. In terms of the language of the individual soul, standstill translates into hopelessness; in terms of collective consciousness, into social apathy. Prior to 1989 in countries such as Poland, if you had moved at all, you didn't do much more than tremble with fear or helpless rage, the way a slice of fish aspic wobbles on a plate.

The simile made more accurate, you may wonder what the correction means in practical terms. On the one hand, turning aspic into aquarium water sounds an even more futile endeavor. On the other, a nation held tight for forty-five years in the congealed embrace of an immobilizing political system feels understandably relieved even as the aspic begins to melt. The resulting fluid is obviously a far cry from the fresh and bubbly water of prosperous democracy. But the hopelessness is gone. You may be pessimistic about your nation's future, but for the first time in your life you admit that there *is* a future.

What I found in Poland in the first days of May 1990 was a curious mixture of these two emotions: the sense of what one might call guarded pessimism and the sense of relief. It was my first trip to my home country since I had come to the United States in March 1981, any previous visit having been ruled out by the fact that during martial law the authorities unilaterally invalidated my Polish passport. Since then, my stay abroad was, from the point of view of the Polish secret police, illegal. Had I tried to reenter the Polish portion of the East European aspic before 1989, I might have been let in but most probably not let out again. This time, a brand new passport securely in my breast pocket and a brand new name for my old country gracing the consulate that had issued the document (the Republic of Poland rather than People's Poland), I breezed past young border guards at

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the Warsaw airport with no trouble at all. Those guards looked as if they had been grade-school kids back in 1981.

Not everything in Poland looks so young and squeaky clean. After those nine years I did expect a visual and pulmonary shock, yet the deterioration of both the urban and natural environments is something you must see and inhale to realize. In Warsaw, you may rejoice upon surveying the familiar square in downtown and not finding Felix Dzerzhynski's monument that used to be its centerpiece (after decades of standing there, sometimes with hands painted red under the cover of night by a resourceful protester, Mr. Conscience-of-the-Revolution was unceremoniously knocked down and removed last spring). But the effect of its disappearance is partly wasted, since the empty pedestal is obscured by a fence with large letters: WORK SUSPENDED.

Similar fences with similar Balthazar's-feast inscriptions have sprung up all over Warsaw. They surround unfinished buildings or the construction sites of the subway system, which was half-heartedly initiated before the political upheaval of 1989 but has never really gotten underway. In Kraków, the beautiful old city with houses and monuments literally crumbling from fumes and chemical emitted by the nearby Nowa Huta steel mill and other factories, the notoriously bad quality of the air gets to you on the first day of your visit. You do not merely feel it in your lungs but also see it in the form of fine particles of soot settling immediately on your skin and clothes. Those who are not accidental tourists but have to live in Kraków on a daily basis (due to the situation in housing, moving anywhere else is, as a rule, unthinkable) face staggering health problems, the effects of which are especially dangerous to young children.

The massive environmental devastation, the still catastrophic state of housing, the economic stagnation of which suspended public works are just the most eye-catching signal: these, and more, are huge chunks of Communism's frozen aspic that the new Poland has not yet managed to melt down. The law on privatization of the economy, including heavy industry, has only very recently, after a protracted and often bitter debate, been passed by the Parliament. How to implement it in a country with an impoverished populace is still anybody's guess. The easiest solution, which would consist of permitting indiscriminate foreign capital investment, fuels political fears that Poland could become the economic colony of other nations.

Still, even in Poland's economy something has stirred. The adoption of the "Balcerowicz Plan," as the Poles, by reference to the new Minister of Finance Leszek Balcerowicz, have termed the way of jumping straight back, with no half-measures and no intermediary stages, into the market system, has already had at least one beneficial effect: the elimination of price subsidies has succeeded in curbing the inflation that raged as recently as the end of 1989. For the first time since 1944, Polish money has some real value,

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particularly because you may now convert it legally, at a relatively stable rate, into foreign currencies. The *kantor* (a privately-owned foreign currency exchange office) seems to have completely replaced in the streets the ubiquitous figure of yore, the so-called *cinkciarz* (a slang word derived from a distortion of "Change money?" with which such shady types, usually allowed to operate in exchange for sharing their profits with the police, used to approach prospective clients in the past). You may also spend your *zlotys* on some real merchandise. Everybody I met during my trip complained of high prices but admitted in the same breath that at least store shelves aren't empty now.

In fact, the time-honored expression "store shelves" is not exactly to the point. Numerous products can now be bought, if you can afford them, off the street stands that clutter every sidewalk in view. It looks as if the Poles have become modern Phoenicians, a nation of merchants travelling in flocks to neighboring Germany to sell homemade sausage in a Berlin street and buy ten boxes of laundry detergent there to resell for a profit in Warsaw. Humiliating though it may be for the national morale, it is a fact of life. It's enough for a visitor to walk a couple of blocks down Marszalkowska Street in the very center of Warsaw to grasp both the negative and positive aspects of this fact. This street has acquired an almost symbolic look these days. If you face the rotary at the crossing of Marszalkowska with Aleje Jerozolimskie, there looms to your right the colossal feast of bad taste, the infamous Palace of Culture, Joseph Stalin's "gift" to Warsaw: he was magnanimous enough to dump it on the city just a couple of years after he allowed Warsaw to be burned down to its foundation in 1944, by ordering his troops to stand idle for two months on the Vistula's right bank while the Nazis were busy quashing the Warsaw Uprising. To your left, you see the so-called East Wall, a row of now-dilapidated high-rise buildings which in the sixties represented Wladyslaw Gomulka's attempt to grace the capital with a bit of Western flair. The Palace of Culture, however, towers above another tall fence surrounding a bit of Edward Gierek's and Wojciech Jaruzelski's heritage: the suspended excavations for the city's subway system. On the other side of the street you are separated from the East Wall by a thick crowd of peddlers who display their wares, ranging from halved beef carcasses to plastic haircombs, on anything from the back of a truck to an upturned cardboard box. The marble walls of the Palace, the glass and concrete walls of the shabby Socialist skyscrapers, the plywood wall of the fence, the human walls of the sidewalk vendors: four epochs, and a brief history of the decline and fall of the Communist empire, squeezed into one street. As we pass a guy, apparently a farmer from the provinces, who is doing a brisk business selling pork off his old van parked on the sidewalk (I'm not particularly impressed by the hygiene of the operation, but the meat itself looks fresh), I ask a friend, "But doesn't Warsaw look like a third world capital now?" He shrugs, "It's

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progress, isn't it? With lines in front of empty stores, this city had a fourth world look not so long ago."

He is right: the queues, so symbolic of the quality of life in a Socialist state, have all but disappeared from Warsaw streets (if you don't count the enormous lines in front of Western embassies' visa offices). Free enterprise provides competition; competition provides better supply, better service, and even lower prices: capitalist commonplaces seem to work at least at the level of Marszalkowska Street and the farmer's van. In the larger perspective, though, the first beneficial consequences of the switch to a market economy are counterbalanced, if not overshadowed, in the eyes of the average consumer by its negative side effects. You may buy your pork chops straight from the itinerant farmer-salesman for a lower price than at the nearby butcher's but, on the whole, the cost of living has risen dramatically. This is a result of sharp price increases caused by stopping the government subsidies in virtually every area of production and services, from agriculture to mining to housing to transportation. Perhaps more important in the long run, the looming vision of the capitalist catch-as-catch-can system makes many people wonder what the fate of those less aggressive, less able, or just less lucky is going to be. What about the old and disabled? What about the severely underfunded orphanages and houses for the mentally impaired? What about the unemployed, whose number at this point, with no genuinely massive layoffs put in effect yet, has already reached 700,000?

And what about other areas of life, seemingly not so necessary for society to physically survive, therefore the first to get hurt by the economic reform's paring knife? Culture, in particular, seems to have been victimized most severely in this way during the first year of post-Socialist Poland: an ironic development in the nation that owes a great deal of its political transformation to the courage, determination, and ethical spirit instilled in the minds of its best people precisely by its culture. This particular area may not mean much in the daily life of the man in the street, but culture's withering may have ominous long-term consequences. The artistic, literary, and scholarly communities in Poland, in any case, are still reeling from the shock. There is no shortage of indignant voices of intellectuals who, generally supportive of the new government's policies, accuse the Parliament and the members of Tadeusz Mazowiecki's Cabinet of indifference toward Polish culture's future. Izabella Cywinska, a well-known theater director and former Solidarity activist who serves as the Minister of Culture, has become the critics' favorite scapegoat for her alleged lack of guts in defending culture's interests, even though she has managed to ensure the continuation of government subsidies for a selected group of the most cherished, and most endangered, cultural institutions such as several literary periodicals and a few dozen theaters.

The writer Jacek Bochenski recently reminded his colleagues in a sober speech that the future of culture is part of the future of the entire nation;

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therefore, intellectuals should think twice before they start antagonizing other social groups by demanding special privileges for themselves. But Bochenski also emphasized what enthusiasts of a market economy tend to forget: the supposedly high-brow kinds of cultural activities and areas of culture must not be simply scrapped just because they do not bring profit. Subsidizing such areas is not a special privilege: it is a necessary investment without which the nation's tradition, sense of identity, spiritual resourcefulness, and moral principles may not survive.

It's a different question, of course, whence the subsidies should come. Those in Poland who opt for culture to be left completely to its own devices, "just as it's being done in the West" only reveal their monumental ignorance of the facts, such as the existence of federal, state, or city support for the arts even in super-capitalist America (limited as it is here), not to mention the entire system of individual and corporate tax-exempt donations. There's the rub: the Polish tax laws are still not very clear in this respect. Before Poland's new millionaires (billionaires, to be exact, since a million *zlotys* is slightly more than the average monthly salary these days) are given this sort of incentive to support culture, then, it is crucial for the government to provide a cushion that would soften the impact of the economic reform on culture's producers.

In the eyes of the opponents of a subsidized culture, however, this idea raises the ugly specter of the government's control over culture, a thing of the past that certainly nobody, not even a struggling artist, would be eager to bring back from its grave. One major way of exerting such control has been happily abolished: early this year the Parliament unanimously disposed of the hated Main Office for the Control of the Press, Publications, and Performances, thus ending forty-five years of preventive censorship in Poland. But for quite a long time censorship hadn't been a real problem: even before 1989 it had grown lax, as if the censors sensed the institution's imminent demise. And since the emergence of the Mazowiecki government there has been, of course, practically no such thing as a forbidden topic or an illegal way of publishing an author's thoughts. (As a result, freedom of expression shows its ugly underside too: at least such a strange thought visits the mind of a sworn enemy of censorship such as myself, as I look at the walls of venerated monuments of architecture in downtown Warsaw covered with political graffiti and glued-on posters, or as I watch a television report of a brawl provoked by a group of skinheads wearing T-shirts adorned with swastikas, serving as bodyguards for the Congress of the Polish Right.)

The Polish bookstores I visited offered everything from books on the Katyn massacre and denunciations of Gorbachev's imperialistic policies to sex manuals and soft-core erotic novels (with not very much in between, to be sure: the struggling publishing houses seem to be aiming at quick profits by selling formerly forbidden fruit, before they secure their existence enough to

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risk publishing anything more ambitious). What the government's opponents still point to as the remnant of the state's control over information and culture are mostly mass media, and particularly television. Polish television, while commendably open to differing and controversial views, is formally still a monopolistic, state-owned institution, and serious debates on its deregulation have only recently started. Moreover, if there is any government official in the field of culture more mercilessly criticized than Minister Cywinska, it is certainly the General Director of Television, Andrzej Drawicz.

I happen to know Drawicz quite well personally: in the late seventies we used to meet often, along with a few other dissident writers, in the Warsaw apartments of Jacek Bochenski or the poet Wiktor Woroszylski to discuss the contents of the next issues of the uncensored literary journal *Zapis*, which we then coedited. A brilliant literary critic and scholar (his field of expertise is twentieth-century Russian literature) as well as an energetic man of action, Drawicz seemed at first to be a startling but promising choice for the head of the "new" television. The trouble was that within the basically unchanged administrative framework of that institution, Drawicz has not had much of a chance to introduce anything genuinely new. He also grossly miscalculated in announcing publicly, upon taking up his duties, that he would not engage in any witch hunts but instead would try to solve the personnel difficulties "in the Christian spirit." The idea behind his phrase was to move the most compromised sycophants of the Communist regime to less visible positions (for instance, he took off the air the most shameless liar among the television reporters, Marek Tumanowicz, and offered him an insignificant technical job) and eventually remove them in a gradual manner rather than to fire all of them on the spot. In fact, the rationale for such tactics lay in practical considerations rather than in Christian ethics: a radical purge would have stopped television's operation for at least several months, before new crews would have a chance to learn the basics of their jobs. But, as it turned out, Drawicz underestimated the degree of the public's resentment toward the old network. Everyone in Poland had vivid memories of the news anchors appearing on the air in military uniforms in December 1981, and of the impudence with which outrageous lies had flowed from television screens ever since. It was precisely a witch hunt that the average television viewer wished for and expected. Soon after Drawicz's nomination, enraged letters started pouring in from all over the country, accusing him of dragging his feet and protecting "the Reds," if not of actually being a downright "crypto-Communist." (His, and Polish television's, approval rate, though, has climbed considerably over the past few months.)

Drawicz's miscalculation and the public reaction to it are characteristic of a conflict of much greater magnitude, perhaps the central conflict in Poland's political life these days. I am referring to the conflict between the supporters of Mazowiecki's program of reform and the followers of Lech Walesa's slo-

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gan of "acceleration." For the latter, "acceleration" means not so much speeding up the economic changes (they admit they do not have any economic program of their own) as being able to gain popularity by unleashing society's thirst for revenge on the hated "Reds." To that end, they exploit many people's irrational yet deep-seated distrust in the alleged "new *nomenklatura*" of today's Poland by suggesting the existence of some leftist plot in the Parliament and government, one aimed at protecting the former Communists and keeping some of them in power. To every thinking person, this is obvious trash: the government and the Parliament have no choice but to honor the provisions of the "historic compromise" achieved as a result of the Roundtable Negotiations in 1989, at least until the new general elections. To throw out the elected deputies from the Sejm, to confiscate by decree all the assets of the former Communist party, or to prevent each and every former Communist from political activity (as if each and every former member of the Polish United Workers' Party had to be automatically responsible for a crime or two), as some propose to do, would mean lawlessness, rule of the mob, and the virtual end of democracy in Poland. It is true that Polish society is seriously bothered by the fact that many officials of the old regime, instead of being punished in one way or another, are using their past connections to make new careers in free enterprise; or that employees of the now-disbanded secret police have managed to destroy a large part of their files and continue to be a threat to social stability. Yet no one in his right mind can seriously claim that the Mazowiecki government condones all this. On the contrary, events such as the nomination of Krzysztof Kozlowski as Deputy Minister and then Minister of the Interior, and the energetic purge he started immediately in his Ministry, show the government's intentions clearly enough. Demagoguery is always easy, if you neglect to mention to the people what the cost of radical "acceleration" would be.

My visit in May happened to coincide with the first signs of the impending rift in Solidarity. As I write, in mid-August, the rift has become reality. After several increasingly bitter confrontations between Lech Walesa and his recent supporters on the one hand and his former collaborators on the other, Solidarity has split into two factions which at this writing have evolved into full-fledged political parties. But the split consists of much more than this. What broke in half in the process was also Solidarity's old unity, the very ethos of solidarity with a small "s," tested in the fire of much harsher times but now unable to withstand the pressure of conflicting political interests.

Natural as it is under the conditions of today's Poland, where no single powerful enemy exists any longer and where freedom of speech and freedom of association have been restored precisely to allow society's conflicting interests to manifest themselves publicly, this outcome nevertheless has something sad about it. Gone are the good old days of noble heroes and their common struggle against unequivocal evil. Gone is the moral authority of the

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living legends of Solidarity's heyday, such as Walesa himself. By the time this essay appears in print, Walesa may well have been elected president of Poland, if the elections are indeed to be held as early as he wishes and if Polish people choose to remember his jump over the Lenin Shipyard fence in 1980 or his steadfastness during martial law, rather than his more recent displays of unmitigated ambition and autocratic manner. Yes, he may be the new Polish Republic's first democratically elected president. Yet the methods to which he resorted in order to promote his candidacy – getting rid of all his most loyal collaborators who might try to persuade him not to run; surrounding himself with a circle of yesmen and people with their own petty agendas for personal advancement or revenge; groundless attacks on Mazowiecki's government; irresponsible wielding of populist slogans; stirring irrational resentments and pitting social groups against each other; barely masked aspirations to authoritarian power – leave the observer with a feeling of, to use the word once again, sadness. There is every reason to rejoice when a common man achieves historic greatness. There is every reason to be sad when a great historical figure turns out to be a small man.

"Post-totalitarian melancholy," as Tzvetan Todorov has aptly called it, is descending on Eastern Europe. What else could you expect after last year's euphoria? *Omne animal post victoriam triste.* It's the unavoidable *tristesse* of human normality, of the world inhabited by petty-minded opportunists rather than noble spirits, consisting of compromises and concessions rather than heroic struggle and resistance, lit by the pluralistic chiaroscuro of different interests and opinions rather than the dazzling light of common goals and truths shared by all.

Still, it gives me pleasure to remember a moment last May, when in a bus rushing through downtown Warsaw I caught myself registering two things at once. One was the fact that I couldn't find the monument of Felix Dzerzhynski where it always used to be. The other was the laughter and high-pitched voices of four kids in nearby seats, apparently high-school freshmen, who amused themselves by debating out loud (jokingly, but with a profound knowledge of the subject) what position in Poland's government each of them would accept, had he or she been made an offer. When these two sensations intersected, I was struck by one thought. These kids have no fear, and they do have hope. Whatever may happen, they stand a good chance they will have lived all their lives in a Poland where no Felix Dzerzhynski is given a monument and life does not resemble fish aspic. If only for that, it was worth it. If only these kids can go on laughing like that, give us all the "post-totalitarian melancholy" there is.

August 1990

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Edith Kurzweil

THE CASTLE

If there is such a thing as a postmodernist revolution, it happened in Prague where, as President Vaclav Havel might say, the absurd became meaningful and the meaningful absurd. Guided by theater people, the continuation of the Prague Spring was bound to turn into an ongoing theatrical performance that aims to push the original miracle to its utmost, to convert the exploited Czech population to democracy, and to privatize its economy.

I went to Prague to find out how postmodernist theater translates itself into practical politics, how actors, directors and playwrights manage a country the Communists made unmanageable. "President Havel likes performance," said Peter Oslzly, playwright and dramaturgist of the experimental "theater on a string" and a member of the Advisory Board of the President. The performance, however, I soon realized, is reflective and serious: it's a theater of reality set in a surreal city full of mysteries and relics of its past. Every actor knows that even the slightest move is bound to have immense repercussions on all Czechs – who are expected to join as participating audience.

We know, of course, that this is the condition of all democracies and we have read about the similarities and differences of the many problems facing every one of the countries that recently threw off its former yoke. But before I spoke to three people who work in The Castle, the erstwhile residence of Czech kings, Hapsburg emperors, and subsequently of the leaders of the Czechoslovak Republic, the Nazis, the postwar Republic, and then the Communists, I had not realized that the Czechs alone expect to superimpose cultural imperatives on economic ones, rather than have the economy determine the future of their culture.

Although Eda Kriseova, writer and official Literary Advisor to the President, had spoken of the decay of this formerly rich country when she was in New York, her words became reality only after my train crossed the Austrian border: it slowed to a crawl in order not to derail on the defective roadbed. The disrepair of houses, the antiquated farm equipment, and the general poverty were blatantly observable. However, when Arita Huckova, Kriseova's assistant, met me at Prague's Central Station I forgot the drabness. She showed me around and even managed to get me the room of a "no-show" at the Intercontinental Hotel – on the banks of the Vltava and with a fabulous view of the Castle. (With few exceptions, Prague hotels are as dismal as the roadbeds.) And she arranged an interview with Milan Uhde, the brand new Minister of Culture, for that evening.

"My ministry covers the realms of literature, theater, art, sculpture,

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monuments, galleries and museums," he told me at the outset, "and we do not expect to regulate culture but to nurture it. Our most immediate problems derive from the pressure of our new market system – which frightens even our artists. We have to fight against this fear, quietly, even though no one knows exactly how to proceed. For instance, the City of Prague needed space for business, for German or American or French firms to open offices, etcetera, so a law was passed to have artists vacate their studios and move them to the outskirts of the city. Now some of them demonstrate and write letters." Minister Uhde's own discomfort at the situation was palpable. He understands why his constituents are disappointed in the revolution, that they need rooms, that some fear they cannot work in unfamiliar surroundings and are correct in estimating that the inefficient building industry will not be able to provide them with new studios for ten years. "We also need theaters," continued Mr. Uhde. "In the past every accepted company was subsidized by the government or by one of its agencies, and was entitled to its own premises, to put on plays of its own, to have a steady repertory. Now that we have freedom, our audience wants interesting plays only, and directors and dramaturgists have to find good ones; actors may no longer be signed up for unlimited contracts; and they wonder whether it would be more advantageous to belong to local or national companies. All of this exacerbates their fears, particularly in older people. Thus they say that functionaries lack taste, don't know what art is, what a play is."

Minister Uhde is in a particular dilemma because the theater people are his friends, and he would like to help them all but doesn't have the funds. His own plays, banned for twenty years, are now being performed, as are those by other former dissidents – not because they now are in charge but because the plays are appealing. "The main obstacle arises from the fact that people are not accustomed to taking risks," says Uhde, who considers it his job to remind his colleagues that "such a situation is better than the totalitarian one where we were under constant threat." Taking risks, it seems, is a democratic right no one appreciates. In answer to my questions about the dangers of consumerism and of the levelling of taste, Minister Uhde responded that he could only guess at it, because currently there is a hunger for the best of Czech literature that so far has been banned – Kundera, Skvorecky, Seifert, Capek, Kafka. "The present situation where, for instance, Roman Vasulik's book, *Daydreams*, will have a print run of 150,000 is extraordinary," he went on, "but in the future we may well have to deal with the dangers of consumerism."

In the meantime, Minister Uhde trusts Prime Minister Dr. Petr Pithard to guide the economy and to receive outside help through loans and investments. He is afraid only "of the moral side of the problems, of the exhaustion of people who for forty-two years have lived under the pressure of a totalitarian regime and who may give in to naive notions, who may lack the nec-

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essary patience." Uhde responded at another point: "The revolution, though prepared by Charter 77 and led by artists and dissidents, happened through the actions of the entire population, but now we have to come to grips with the problems of daily life."

I gathered that President Havel appoints experts to specific cabinet posts and then trusts them to do their jobs and to formulate the laws which Parliament must approve. There, however, is one of the many Catch-22 situations. For example, in November communal elections are to take place and the laws passed by Parliament are to be ratified. But this means that there is not enough time to discuss these laws before the National Assembly disbands for the summer and to organize enough public debate which, among other things, serves as education for democracy. Without the new laws, however, the move to the market economy and the many pending agreements with foreign investors cannot be implemented. "In other historical situations, as for instance during the French revolution, the economy was ready, the bourgeoisie already controlled the finances. But we defeated the Communists who had run the country into the ground and thus must start from zero. We need the help of experienced people, and we don't even know how to judge them, and whom to trust. Even in my limited field, we have trouble because print shops lack presses, and their techniques are outdated," Uhde told me.

The most immediate trouble, however, was the shortage of gasoline. While wondering whether or not Minister Klaus in his radio address was telling the truth or trying to calm the panic at the gas stations (rumor had it that the Soviet Union would interrupt its supply), Minister Uhde told me that his chauffeur had spent many hours in line to receive his allotted five gallons. So had the taxi driver who reluctantly consented to take me to the Castle the following day.

Although I had been apprised of the grandeur of the baroque Castle and the gothic cathedral it surrounds, I was totally unaware that I would witness a changing of the guard. Every bit as festive as the ceremony at Buckingham Palace, Havel's bluish-gray uniformed, trim and shiny sentries marched, saluted, and replaced each other to the tune of red-clad trumpeters whose instruments sparkled from their posts on upstairs balconies. This was theater in action, and a reminder that this government incorporates tradition in its revolution. The crowd was moved, and I noticed two middle-aged men wipe away a few tears.

Inside the Castle, security seemed minimal, although I had to wait for Arita Hucková to meet me downstairs. Part of the group that signed Charter 77, she beamed while showing me "her" Castle as any proud homeowner would. And she immediately informed me that she had arranged another interview for me, which had to take place at once. Until she presented me to Petr Oslzly, who is in his early forties, I had thought that all Czechs were

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around fifty-three, like Havel. Oslzly, who founded a new theater company, now negotiates with unions and all sorts of other organizations. He addresses some of the same issues as Minister Uhde. In answer to my question about the possible dangers of nepotism, he stated that the struggle against it – an "ethical imperative" – is bound to be won, because different offices represent local and national entities, so that it is possible to go against a minister as easily as against anyone else. "By holding on to the many alternative levels of culture, to the unique experiences of the people in this government, to their past experiences, we are militating against corruption," he went on. "Moreover, they all expect to go back to the theater, to writing, and to give up governing. This too is reassuring."

All along, I was struck by the sincerity and the intelligence of my interlocutors, and by their eagerness to hear about the rest of the world. They all had been deprived of their passports and of their drivers' licenses, Uhde after 1970, the others after 1977. To be able to take a trip, to see even other Soviet-dominated countries, had been impossible, and this appears to add yet another dimension to their current pleasure at liberation. (Oslzly has had some contact with a number of experimental theater groups in the United States.)

The forced isolation also explains the low level of awareness of practical matters mixed in with an inordinate amount of political savvy in the best sense. "In our theater politics are central because the struggle always was against totalitarian and for democratic ideas. We always were politicians, and will continue to be politicians, whether we write on environmental issues or discuss conceptions of cultural life," Oslzly asserted. "The position of Czech, Jewish, and German intellectuals must be recreated in Central Europe in order to create the character of Central Europe," he went on, "but this cannot be an immediate project because we lost our memory and this memory is still a mystery."

In different ways, Huckova, Oslzly and Uhde stated that anti-Semitism is still alive, though no more than during the Hapsburg Empire. "Now it is part of a large and nonvisible problem of racism which includes Gypsies, Vietnamese, Blacks, and Poles. Anti-Semitism was strong under the communists, when even a play about the children of Theresienstadt was banned and everything referring to Jewish tradition was forbidden." Oslzly thought that intellectuals were hungry for Jewish culture, and noted that Prague had very few Jews. (Actually, Czechoslovakia had 70,000 Jews before the Holocaust and now has 4,000 – many of whom for the first time want to learn about the religion they were not allowed to practice after 1948.) Under the circumstances, I was struck by the brochure I bought when visiting the Jewish Cemetery and the Jewish Museum, a few steps from my hotel in the center of town. I read that "the State Jewish Museum in Prague was founded on the basis of a decree issued by the government of

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the Czechoslovak Republic in 1950 when, in connection with the beginning of the building-up of a developed socialist society, the Czechoslovak socialist state itself took over the task of caring for museum collections and other cultural values in order that they might be widely accessible to the public and exploited for cultural-political and scientific purposes." On the same day, the *Herald Tribune* carried an article, "A Polish Anomaly: Anti-Semitism Without Jews." But rather than an anomaly, I thought to myself, anti-Semitism without Jews seems to have been the norm in the entire Soviet empire. What have Trotsky, Rosa Luxemburg, and Karl Liebknecht been thinking in their graves? And how will it be possible to reeducate populations for whom bigotry has become ingrained? In any event, the Jewish community ultimately will benefit: the Soviet propagandists cared for the magnificent Torahs and other religious relics for which it will be able to collect admission fees from the many tourists who are beginning to flock to Prague.

For the moment, Prague attracts young and impecunious tourists, backpackers, East Germans and Hungarians who are eager to travel but can't pay Western prices. For those who have come to shop, the pickings are slim. The lines in front of the stores selling Bohemian crystal and porcelain are long; the service is inefficient. After a two-hour wait, the American in line behind me remarked that he would tell his friends to bypass Prague "until they shape up." Over dinner that night I asked Arita why they don't employ more sales clerks and simplify the system – which also would get them more foreign currency. "Before we do that, we have to change our production: our machines are working at full capacity, and are close to falling apart; our factories are inefficient; if we were to sell more than we do on any one day we would have to close shop the next one; and we would have more unemployment." Similar conditions exist everywhere – in steel plants and automobile plants, in the manufacture of consumer goods, hospital and office equipment. Hospitals lack medicine and equipment; doctors are underpaid, overworked; patients must go to district physicians. "Yes, we need help," said Minister Uhde, "but we also have to do things ourselves, we must become competent."

Upon my return to Vienna there was much criticism of President Havel's trip to Salzburg, of his meeting with the nefarious President Waldheim. Havel stated that he had decided to attend the *Festspiele* before being elected President and therefore would stick to his plan. His critics implied that he was becoming a politician. Maybe. He, however, might argue once again – laughingly – that "there is always something suspect about an intelletual on the winning side," and that, "like Sisyphus he has remained undefeated despite all his defeats." At least until now. But he must produce another miracle – by propelling Czechoslovakia into the democratic orbit without losing any of his Czechs, his Bohemians, or his Slovaks.

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Heather MacDonald

POSTMODERNISM AND ITS DISCONTENTED

Postmodernists insist that Western "discourse" be opened to voices previously silenced – the most sought after being nonwhite, female, or homosexual. This seemingly unqualified invitation to the so-called victims of Western culture has, however, one catch: postmodernist discourse is conducted in only one language – high theory – and the participants refuse to provide a translation. If you seek entrance to postmodernist discourse, unless you can utter one of the passwords, such as, "The absence of presence underwrites the exteriority of the interior," your voice will not be heard.

A symposium last year at the Whitney Museum of American Art entitled "Postmodernism and Its Discontents" (November 5, 1989) dramatized this contradiction between postmodernist theory and practice. The panelists included Douglas Crimp, art critic and Coeditor of the journal *October*; Martha Rossler, video artist; Homi Bhabha, Lecturer in Literature at the University of Sussex, England; and Michele Wallace, Assistant Professor of English at City College. Brian Wallace, Senior Editor of *Art in America*, moderated.

After the panelists had delivered papers ranging in subject from the repression of gay speech at Yale University to the economic and social dislocations of the Reagan years, Wallace solicited questions from the audience – a big mistake. An older man asked what postmodernism was and why the Whitney had sponsored the symposium, which seemed to be more about politics than art. A number of equally benighted members of the audience breathed a sigh of relief and applauded. The panel was stunned. After whispered consultation, they turned to face the questioner, making no effort to conceal their contempt. Why had he attended the symposium if he was ignorant about postmodernism? (Although the panel was sponsored by the Whitney Museum's Public Education Department, apparently education was not one of its goals.) Besides, what else had they been discussing if not postmodernism? (None of the speakers had discussed postmodernism directly or offered a definition of the term.) It was sheer impertinence to suggest that the panel needed justification.

This rebuke did not silence the intruders in the audience. An older woman asked apologetically when postmodernism began, what its aesthetic was, and who its practitioners were. This was really too much. Rossler shot out petulantly: "1965. Only one question per questioner. Next?" Bhabha, gesturing to Rossler, adopted her no-nonsense approach: "There's one [practitioner of postmodernism] sitting next to me." Crimp tartly reminded the questioner that he had discussed one piece of art in his talk and then con-

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descended to explain why these questions were so preposterous. If he told someone seeking examples of postmodernism to study the work of, for instance, Julian Schnabel, he would risk canonizing Schnabel. But postmodernism is precisely about the rejection of a canon. Likewise, to ask for a definition of postmodernism presupposes that language can objectively describe or define things. But, he added, postmodernism views language as an unstable and self-referential medium, incapable of capturing the essences of things. Moreover, postmodernism is a "practice," not a theory (hence, by implication, too varied to be defined).

The other people in the audience who had applauded the first two questioners may not have been informed, but they were not dumb. After the naiveté underlying any request for information had been so mercilessly exposed, they faded into the woodwork and were heard from no more.

The remaining questions fell comfortably within the boundaries of postmodernist discourse. The rhetorical query, inevitable in any gathering of postmodernists – "Who is speaking and who is being silenced in contemporary discourse?" – gained a certain irony from the earlier exchange, which the panelists appeared not to notice. The final comment was gratefully adopted by the panelists as the official gloss of the earlier difficulties: some members of the audience apparently wanted "documentation" of postmodernism, but postmodernism exposes the impossibility of documentation.

Now perhaps when the topic of a public symposium deals with matters of common knowledge, or is clearly meant for a specialized audience, the panelists may justifiably be impatient when a questioner professes complete ignorance of the subject. Postmodernism, however, is not yet a component of basic cultural literacy (at least outside of the academy or SoHo), nor does it flash a warning sign, "For Ph.D.s Only." The panelists at the Whitney should have steeled themselves in advance to the deplorable fact that there are members of the educated public who either missed the latest shows of Sherrie Levine and Jeff Koons, or saw them without a clue as to what they were seeing, and that these people might attend the panel to find out what postmodernism is.

The refusal of the panelists to explain postmodernism, however, represents more than just a protest against audience manners. Poststructuralists and postmodernists unfailingly respond with either disdainful reticence or labyrinthine evasion to requests for explanation, no matter what the forum. The lack of an official explanation of poststructuralism and postmodernism (which might be referred to together as "post-ism") constantly tempts outsiders to offer their own versions of the theories. But any attempt by someone not of the post-ist camp to define its basic premises sets off howls of protest. The outsider will be angrily accused of having either misunderstood or misrepresented the theory, and may even be castigated for using the term "deconstruction," though no such ban exists for its practitioners. Sometimes

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the charges of oversimplification and misrepresentation are warranted. But such accusations are never accompanied by an explanation of post-ism, which would end the need for unauthorized interpretations and might open the field to a greater number of currently excluded "voices."

The reasons given for the silence of the post-ists are always the same: that there is no such thing as "poststructuralism," "deconstruction," or "postmodernism" – it is not a theory but a "practice" that can be neither reduced to a set of principles nor summarized; that there is no authority, no author, nor canon of post-ism; that its rhetoric cannot be translated, because there are no stable meanings available for translation; and that definition is an attempt to repress difference and impose a hierarchical order on a diverse reality.

Jacques Derrida, the progenitor of poststructuralism, justifies his refusal to explain his work with Derridean illogic. He denies that his neologisms and idiosyncratic vocabulary are even words, thus rendering irrelevant all outmoded "logocentric" attempts to define their meaning. "*Différance*," a key neologism in the Derridean lexicon, is "neither a *word* nor a *concept*"; another central term, " 'dissemination' . . . ultimately has no meaning and cannot be channeled into a definition," he writes in *Of Grammatology*. In the same book, Derrida subjects all of his terminology to this scorched-earth policy, stripping it of any possible meaning before anyone else can get to it:

> The *pharmakon* is neither the cure nor the poison, neither good nor evil, neither the inside nor the outside, neither speech nor writing; the *supplément* is neither a plus nor a minus, neither an outside nor the complement of an inside, neither an accident nor an essence, etc.; the *hymen* is neither confusion nor distinction, neither identity nor difference, neither consummation nor virginity, neither the veil nor the unveiling, neither the inside nor the outside, etc.; the *gramme* is neither a signifier nor a signified, neither a sign nor a thing, neither a presence nor an absence, neither a position nor a negation, etc.; *l'espacement* is neither space nor time; the *entame* is neither the integrity of a beginning or of a simple cut nor simply the secondary state. Neither/nor is at once *at once* or rather *or rather*.

So coy a disclaimer virtually begs the reader to conclude that these terms are neither useful in explaining anything nor worthy of extended attention. Is Derrida conceding what his critics have long contended – that his work lacks sense? Alas, no. His defiantly counterfactual assertion that his words are not words is intended, rather, as a romantic gesture of transcendence, the wise folly of a thinker striving toward a new mode of thought beyond the reach of ordinary language and the strictures of common sense.

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The most important effect of Derrida's radical claim, however, is to foreclose debate. Repudiating in advance any meaning for his words allows Derrida to slip out of his language, leaving the critic holding onto something Derrida denies ever owning. It provides him with a ready-made response to criticism of his work: the critic's interpretation has reified his thought, reduced it to a fixed meaning, whereas deconstruction is intended as the very nemesis of fixed meanings. But Derrida and his following cannot both use language and repudiate its consequences. Language inevitably makes distinctions, categorizes, and signifies something rather than nothing or everything at once. To use one word is to decide against another, but Derrida does not want to be held to his choice. In fact, in spite of a prodigious and largely successful effort to mask his intent, Derrida does have something to say. If he truly wanted to signify nothing, he could suspend his torrential output of books and articles.

The assertion made at the Whitney that postmodernism is a "practice" (that is, ineffable) is a broader version of Derrida's claim that his words transcend definition. It is no less disingenuous. Post-ist "practice" is wholly predictable. When applied to literature, it operates like a pair of automatic shears. No matter what the shape of the original poem or novel, the deconstructed version will come out shorn of its characters, plots, themes, and passion, talking exclusively about the insights of post-ism ("the text always already knows that its desire for the signified will be mutilated by the abyssal logic of the signifier," and so on). A postmodernist work of art is obsessed with, or, in the language of high theory, "problematises," representation, doubling, and absence. The predictability of post-ist "practice" results from certain assumptions about language and the self that form the theoretical framework of that "practice." These assumptions are few, dogmatic, and unchanging, and could be communicated to an outsider without irreparable damage to post-ist thought. Works of art or theory deemed "postmodernist" are rooted in various fundamentals of the poststructuralist creed, such as the fictional status of the human subject, the dreary obsession with "absence" – in particular the absence of origins and originals – and the paradoxical view that representation is at once all-powerful and impotent in its main task of referring to the world outside of itself.

The desire to appear spontaneous and antihierarchical also motivates the disclaimer of a post-ist canon. No syllabus drawn from the beleaguered canon of "Western Civilization," however, was ever as monotonous or as devoid of surprise, as the syllabi of contemporary courses in literary theory and the footnotes of such journals as *Artforum* or *October*. Any humanities department with pretensions to being a respectable player at Modern Language Association conventions liberally sows its literature curriculum with the identical set of mostly French theoreticians now thriving at Duke University, the University of California at Irvine, and other current centers of post-ist

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theory. An art critic whose vision has not been corrected by the insights of Derrida, Lyotard, Baudrillard, Foucault, and Barthes can contribute little of value to the dominant discussions of art criticism. Nor have any of the luminaries studied in classrooms across the country and cited in cutting-edge journals ever protested that his or her constant invocation is a dangerous symptom of canon formation.

In castigating the Whitney symposium audience for its archaic desire for knowledge, Crimp failed to mention that he had himself contributed two seminal articles to *October* ("Pictures," Spring 1979; "The Photographic Activity of Postmodernism," Winter 1980) defining the postmodernist movement in photography. Why were the readers of *October* given an explanation of postmodernism denied to the uninitiated at the Whitney? Perhaps because they *were* readers of *October*, and thus already part of the post-ist discourse, whereas the uninitiated at the Whitney confessed their alien status.

The postmodernist call for opening up "discourse" to previously silenced voices represents a facile radicalism that masks a passion for conformity and exclusivity. Without answers to the sort of questions rebuffed at the Whitney, few "postcolonial" persons will be any better prepared to jump into a discussion of, for example, the absence of presence in the photographic image than those naive members of the Whitney audience. But then, why should the post-ist really care whether any "postcolonial" people ever do enter the postmodernist discourse? By the time they mastered the rhetoric necessary for admission, their voices would be indistinguishable from those of the Western post-ists already producing post-ist theory at such a breathtaking pace.

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POEM

Galway Kinnell

THE CEILING

I don't like looking at
this ceiling of sprayed concrete
that would scrape the will out of anyone
who had decided to rise and pass through – just as
the *trompe l'oeil* of jagged rocks
on the Elmer Holmes Bobst Library floor
conjures up shattered flesh
in someone thinking of climbing over
those protruding balusters –
cruciform steel rods baring their row
of sharp crosses along the top, to interdict
the Christians, and make all others imagine
being speared and hooked up halfway over.
But I don't want to wake up under
the smooth-plastered ceiling of my childhood either –
its cracks showed me the way but did not tell me the price.
A mild-spoken, uneasy man in a white jacket speaks
of Elavil, Lithane, Norpramin, Prozac, Desyrel, Xanax.
The woman with black eyes puts
the wafer she spirited out of Mass
under my pillow – scored with a Cross,
it will come apart into four, under
my heavy head, when we tumble,
or toss. I want a kiss
from red lips, like lip-petals in a garden,
speaking I don't know what to the morning.
I don't want to die.
I want to be born.

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FICTION

Anthony Kerrigan

IN NICARAGUA WITH NELSON "MANDALA" AND MY DIVA

For Richard Elman, who was there first with his five senses, for which he was censored by the publishing establishment

My diva ("lover," in the mode of the day in the media: "girl" is out in any vaguely serious connotation) and I had set out for Managua-La Habana from Miami. When we took our seats in the TACA plane (Costa Rican registry) which serves Central America we found ourselves in close proximity to a man imposing by virtue of being covered in turquoise; a large blue-green centerstone on a belt studded with an infinity of other similar stones, hands full of rings, pectoral pendants hanging from chains. Once he took off his Western hat a ponytail snaked down his back.

We were soon talking about the stones and their meaning. Several pendants had ritual significance, it was made clear, and had belonged to this Chief or that one.

We asked the man if he himself were a Chief.

"Well, I am and I'm not. My tribe is not too happy with my views."

On the face of it, the man did not look like an Indian. His eyes were ice-blue. He looked like an Irish or Anglo-Irish adventurer with a certain zeal, a commercial missionary perhaps. He was from Minnesota, spoke unnuanced and unspecific American, and was not actually a Chief.

He was only *part* Indian, it turned out; how much was unclear. We asked his name.

"Nelson Mandala."

My diva ("lover") and I looked away, to stare out the plane window. We did not look at each other.

"I am so called, have bestowed on myself that name, to honor a distant far-off hero who cannot himself carry out his revolutionary commitment to the Revolution and to Nicaragua, where he is also honored as well as by me."

"Mandala? Mandaaala?" my diva ("lover") drawled, drawing out the "a," in unique commentary. An English-born singer, her throaty voice was as full as her lips and clung to the syllables, the one vowel. She was dressed for the tropics in a white minimalist dress. "Onomatopoeia?" she added sugges-

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tively.

This was to be Nelson Mandala's ninth visit to Nicaragua. His mission this time seemed to be to get to Bluefields and the Caribbean Coast, where the English-speaking Blacks were "not quite sympathetic to the Revolution." Nelson Mandala wished, apparently, to evangelize them for the Revolution in the name of his name, if not that of his namesake, the other one, Nelson Mandela. Did he know the difference? Was he knowledgeable in Sanskrit, or in modish Oriental religions with their centerpiece mandalas? He was expected, he said, by the revolutionary authorities and would be met at the airport.

"This entire continent will soon be afire with Revolution. It will spread like prairie fire. The American Indian, North and South, will be in the forefront. My people . . ."

We asked about the Indians of Nicaragua, especially the Misquitos, and about Brooklyn Rivera.

"Brooklyn Rivera is a false Indian and an agent of the CIA. He and others like him have misled the Indians of Nicaragua. They have made war on the Revolution through misunderstanding. The Blacks of Bluefields are also misled. I am confident that . . ."

By the time we got to Belize, formerly British Honduras, we were talking only to each other, my diva ("lover") and I. At Belize airport I was surprised by the ubiquitous presence of British soldiers – it was 1986. Belize Airport, as regards the people in sight, looked like Belfast Airport; only the jungle around it belied the impression.

"British imperialists," said Mandala.

We said we knew all about that, from Ireland, even though my diva ("lover") was Jewish, and English at that.

Nelson Mandala had unpacked on the floor of the plane and was hanging ever more chains, jeweled chains over his neck. One particularly large egg-sized piece with attendant satellite stones of matching hues proved to be of cosmic ceremonial importance.

"Only the Chief puts this on, when the braves are going into battle."

Nelson, as we were invited to call him, seemed to grow smaller as he heaped on more and more chains. He had an attaché case-full. We discussed their meanings.

A meal came aboard for all passengers at Belize: quite British, a lot of sweets.

My diva ("lover") was discomfited by so many comfits and thought them sickening. I relished them, most of them. I have a sweet tooth for sure.

"I'd rather some cold toast, lad. Even kippers. I don't fancy tinned sweets on top of mangoes."

My companion's long legs seemed infinite on the narrow plane. She made a face that made her look rather like a Jewish boxer behind her sun-

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glasses.

"The people of Belize will rise . . ." Mr. Mandala – or Nelson, to us – was saying in a most factual and satisfied voice.

The plane was drawn up quite close to an anti-aircraft gun emplacement manned by camouflaged pink-faced Tommies, boys from Belfast itself perhaps. Looking past Mandala out the porthole-window my imagination blurred into a double image and his face fused and grew confused with theirs.

We flew under ominous rain clouds over jungle between mountains into Managua. We lined up for Customs, first to pay the sixty-dollar hard currency compulsory exchange for *córdobas* at a risible rate, for overpriced local currency, amounting to a tax, an octroi in effect, and then for an hours-long intensive *search* through our belongings, every handkerchief and sock unfolded, undone. (What are you searching for with such *detenimiento*? I asked pleasantly in Spanish addressing one young female guard. She was wearing gloves while searching, and I was reminded of the Civil Guards at Spanish airports doing the same when Franco was in power. She replied in a dim but surly voice, *"Hay que mirarlo todo, nunca se sabe . . ."*).

Nelson Mandala had indeed been met by a jeep with military personnel in it when we landed. He went off noiselessly, without saying farewell to anyone. He had been spared all this.

At the airport in Managua no one smoked. Their delicious Flor de Nicaragua cigars were on sale. No one indulged. It was a smoke-free airport when we were there. We stood around for hours for unknown reasons. Perhaps we were being surveyed from a distance through peepholes, being watched for some provocative impulse towards an attempted break-out. Were we being tested?

Later, at the Yankee built-in-the-form-of-a-pyramid Intercontinental Hotel, we spied Nelson Mandala himself ensconced on a sofa in the lobby, surrounded by awestruck and obviously North American student gulls and geese. Immediately next to Mandala, our Nelson, was another red-faced non-Redskin Anglo-Irish type in black with a large pectoral cross on a chain hanging around his neck. Was that a Bishop's ring on his index finger? The two imperious beefeaters seemed to be addressing the flock simultaneously.

At the hotel bookstand *El libro verde de Muhamar El Kadafi* was the geometrical cynosure of all eyes, and superseded any need to focus. It was the green centerpiece in a reredos of Marxist literature bound in red.

From our bedroom window my diva ("lover") and I gazed out over a wasteland of ruins and antitropical nonlandscape. No one was at work in or on the ruins. All the bustle was military.

Next morning, we read the morning's authorized "press," two sheets, over a many-coursed and wonderfully endless sweet breakfast. A layered garden spread out below. Ah, Nelson Mandala was in town:

HA LLEGADO UN "CHIEF" INDIO NORTEAMERICANO

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APODADO "MANDALA" EN VISITA DE SOLIDARIDAD CON NICA Y LA REVOLUCION

After our verdant and fruity breakfast we greeted Chief Mandala in the lobby of the hotel. He was wearing a smile of approval. With the modesty of approved office (the modesty of moveable office), he also wore only one chain, the one which only the Chief wears when the braves are about to go into action.

He confided in us by telling us the news. He had just had the newspaper piece read to him, in translation – he knew no Spanish – and announced the ramifications of his reception:

"Rosario Murillo, the Chief's wife, Mrs. Daniel Ortega, has kindly consented to meet with us. Later Ernesto Cardenal, the Minister of Culture, will address us." ("Us?" Not us, of course.)

We went to see Rosario Murillo, poetess and wife to the Revolution's Chief, on our own. She was not available at her complex. A friend of a friend to whom we had an introduction told us, without much furtive paraphrasing: "She's just aborted another child. Again."

She had already had several children born or aborted but in her press-photographs looked none the worse for wear. A very chic radical.

"She's resting under doctor's orders. And the doctor is afraid she'll try to get up the mountain to Estelí."

The anniversary of the Revolution on 19 July was being celebrated in Estelí this year. As did the Cubans, the *comandantes* of the Politburo changed the venue every year. Hordes of pilgrims had already arrived. (We'd eventually have to move from the Intercontinental, we were told, because of the press of "delegates from fraternal countries already booked.")

On our own again, we went out, my diva ("lover") and I to visit Father Cardenal, the poet, in his compound at the edge of town, a town which was itself centerless, *plaza*-less, a series of edges. There was much memorabilia at his office, but no Cardenal.

His secretaries or receptionists seemed to be called Dulce and Almibar. "He's already left for Estelí. He must be there a week in advance."

Should we follow the masses to Estelí in a few days? We'd have to sleep, my diva ("lover") and I, in the fields.

Before deciding, the next day we went along with some acquaintances to the unveiling and installation of a mural painted and paid for and dedicated To the People, by the "Northamerican Collective for Latin America." There were speeches of "solidarity" in Spanish and English underscored by attacks against the State (the U.S. state, somehow even the South African state, but not the Nicaraguan or Cuban states, which were praised effusively). The highly-charged mural was an amalgam of wrath and overindulgence in paint.

Later the same afternoon we attended a species of seminar under a thatched-roof open-air annex off the hotel garden. As we entered we were

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handed a very large packet of revolutionary books and pamphlets, all extremely well bound. We wondered where they could have been produced. Hardly possible among the ruins. Prague, East Berlin, Havana?

The theme of the seminar was "Sociopolitical Warfare," and it devolved largely around "Economic aggression, U. S. A."

Nelson Mandala was there. He was bearing his bundle of books, perhaps a dozen, all in Spanish, and he hugged them to his chest. We had already been told – by him – that he "claimed no knowledge of Spanish." He seemed to be unknown to this conclave and found himself a random seat, and there he fondled his new collection. When he gave up this activity, he sat impassively. For an hour or so the torrent of exhortation and debate raged around his head. He sat as if in a trance, not turning his head to look at the various speakers who addressed the gathering from different parts of the room.

Did he wonder what everyone was saying in such impassioned voice, or was it enough for him that the lightning in the air found an echo in his own ardor?

Or was it only natural for him to sit like a rock?

Black Nica coffee was served in an interval of the rhetorical downpour buffeting the thatched-roof outbuilding. Nelson Mandala did not seem ill at ease as he wandered from one periphery to another, his impregnable books borne along like a treasure cache. He tried to strike up a conversation with some Mexican "internationalists," delegates-at-large to the Nicaraguan Revolution. Suddenly he was actually talking with a man who proved to be a faculty member of a university in New England. The professor was perfectly bilingual.

It was we who were nonplussed when it was announced in Spanish that an Indian chief would next address the congregation – in English. Mandala was introduced by a Mexican professor on the faculty of another university in the imperialist U. S. A.

Chief Mandala grew red-faced as he began exhorting the largely mestizo and Spanish-speaking conclave. He asked for their support in the Fight Against Racism, and in the struggle to break out of the reactionary Reservation System.

We noticed some previously intense Indians now dozing while the tide of words in an alien tongue swept over them. At the end the speaker was vigorously applauded, even by the two or three people who might have understood him.

The next day Mandala went to Bluefields.

While our new friend Nelson was gone, out of sight, we lived and loved and visited Nicaragua. There were two poles of dialogue; discontent and fervor. Workday people recited a litany of frustration. People in uniform, various uniform (no country we had ever seen had so many), called everyone *compañero* and could recite, at will, a litany of marvels. The complainers

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complained about everything, rather mildly and dispiritedly and almost absentmindedly. The eulogists could summon up charges, countercharges, and amazing statistics about literacy and general health.

One day as we strolled down by the shell of what had been Managua before the great earthquake, we were approached by a shy mulatto who spoke in English. He excused himself for asking but explained that he had most of the fare back to Bluefields, and lacked only what seemed a pittance. Could we be of help? The pocket where I kept the mountain of paper *córdobas* in lieu of change was of easy access. It was a relief to empty it out for a man with an open face. It was probably risible in terms of dollars. I asked a few questions about the mysterious enclave of English-speaking African ethnics on the East Coast of Nicaragua: the place seemed to play a disproportionate role in our brief sojourn. He answered politely but seemed loath to linger.

We had gone no more than fifty yards after we parted when a militiaman stepped out from a fringe of bushes and demanded to know what the *"prieto"* (darky) had said to us.

"Only that he wanted a bit of bus fare to the East Coast, to Bluefields. There's an illness in the family. His brother . . ."

"No! What did he say about our country? *Ese prieto* has been hanging around all morning." The soldier was surprisingly white, no sign of the everyday Indian mixture. "What did he say about our government?"

"Not a word."

My diva ("lover") added, truthfully, in support of our scientific objectivity as trustworthy observers:

"He mentioned some trouble in Bluefields . . . "

The soldier started off smartly in the direction the mulatto had taken. We saw the latter making a beeline across the far end of an empty lot. Lost to us among the ubiquitous debris, both were soon out of sight.

Ever since the first morning in the hotel and the wonderfully succulent tropic breakfast with its endlessly varied fructose we had favored sitting at a certain table – at one side and at the back of the rooms reserved for breakfast only – mainly because of a striking waitress who served that area. She was a lithe, middle-aged dark-skinned woman with an informed look from behind her tinted spectacles, a rather rare sight in themselves in that strongly sunlit country. From our favored table we could not get a fair view of the garden, but the courtesy of the woman whose face, moreover, was full of interest kept us from trying another vantage point. We always spoke in Spanish – until one day she suddenly began speaking to us in English. At that moment everyone else around us had left or was leaving.

"I have listened to you talking . . . You are the first people in months that I feel I can talk to . . . "

"Why us?" said my companion.

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"I know you understand. I know from your jokes, you make fun . . ." Strange to hear this from her, who bore herself as gravely as an Ethiope princess. "You are always touching each other, always touching . . . with your legs under the table . . . You understand more than politics . . . Not like the other foreigners who come here, the *internacionalistas*, especially the ones from your country. They understand nothing about life, and nothing about this country . . . Now I'll tell you quickly. I am from Bluefields, like the boy you helped the other day on the street. He is the only son of my best friend there, the only son left. There were two others. They refused to go to the Army . . . A month ago, one night, they were taken away. A patrol of soldiers came and took them . . . In the morning, my friend, their mother, found her two sons when she opened the door to go out and look for them . . . They were in pieces . . . Their arms and legs were cut off as well as their heads . . . There was a note . . . signed by the *Contras*. But it was not the *Contras* who killed them. It was the *Sandinistas*. They want us to believe, everyone to believe, the people to believe that the *Contras* kill us . . . I had to tell you this. The boy you helped in the street, the last son, Ruby, is risking his life coming and going across the country . . . He lives only so that people everywhere will know the truth . . ."

The waitress, whose face was full of interest and who gave the impression of being strong-willed, seemed suddenly to lose her way.

"On the floor right above us the Sandinistas have stored hundreds of guns and grenades . . . It's a fortress. We live in fear . . . for our lives, especially those of us from Bluefields. They hate us because we're part African and not mestizos the way they are, or like most of the government, who are all white. And because we speak English over there . . ."

She went on in rambling detail, caught up in her frustrations, which included a need for good soap. She hadn't had " a decent bath with good soap" in such a long time . . . She didn't ask us to send her any, as others had.

"You know that American Indian chief you sometimes speak to . . . He never speaks to me, never has, although I'm the only one down here who can speak English, and he doesn't know Spanish . . . Now he's gone over there . . . "

The manager, the man in charge, to whom everyone else looked up (was he a commissar, the man in charge of thoughts as well as of restaurant details, was he the "brains" of the place?) was now walking over in an easy-going way, to remind her, most casually and even cordially, that is was time to clear the room. He might have been a Spanish headwaiter in Madrid: very formal, "correct," but without malice on the face of it. The waitress did not leave "in a flurry." She resumed her routine with her own tropical dignity.

Time was passing, The Havana celebrations would be on us faster than those at Estelí. As the two National Fiestas to Revolution approached

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we opted for Havana, which was our eventual destination in any case and where the anniversary of Fidel's *attentat*-before-the-revolt, the disastrous and suicidal attack on the Cuban Army under Batista at the Moncada Barracks, would be celebrated a few days after the Sandinista Anniversary at Estelí. My diva ("lover") was impatient to see the Havana of her imagination, and of my youth. We wondered if the foundation which was paying for us to look in on the twin Revolutions would appreciate the benefits of counting on one's diva ("lover") for a visit to liberated countries.

When we returned to Managua after two weeks in La Habana, as our tickets and visas required, we stayed again at the Intercontinental Hotel for the night before taking the next day's plane back to Miami.

On that morning of our last day we made our way to the *Sala de Desayunos* and found our regular table. Our Bluefields-native looked hieratic, distant in her dignity. We lingered over our last breakfast in Managua until the place was near-empty again. And she approached in concentric circles of heightened conspiracy. At length she found the right moment. She herself seemed a revelation.

"The Indian chief, your Mandala man, is gone. He is no more. The last son, Ruby, brought me a letter yesterday from his mother, and he told me everything that happened, more than the letters . . . Only some ten or twelve days ago, my friend was visited late at night by two men she knew, who are like *primos* to her. They told her to follow them, and took her by a back route to avoid the soldiers, to a place from which she could see the front of the Moravian church. They told her to watch the front door. Just before the sun began to be light, two men, perhaps the same two, came with a large sack they were carrying between them. They emptied it. She knew they wanted her to see what they had put there . . . After they went away, she went to see . . . It was the same sight she had seen before when she opened her front door that time at dawn. Two arms, two legs, a head. A body without the parts . . . A chain with good stones was hanging on the church door."

The woman from Bluefields at length paused.

"Venganza!" She used the one terrifying word, in Spanish.

"Her sons' honor! . . . She heard what she thought was a patrol and hurried back to her hiding place and watched from a safe place. Soon some other people came and she saw them coming and going around the entrance . . . As soon as they left, she started home, after going by the front of the church again, to take a last look . . . Nothing was left but the chain on the door . . . And some blood . . . The pieces of man had been carried away . . . Why did they leave the chain? She didn't touch it either . . ."

Our Bluefields woman again paused, and, as she turned to go back to her routine, she said slowly:

"Your Indian chief is gone. Perhaps some people in Bluefields could do

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something with the meat. Good for the dogs. They're starving in the hills . . . "

Post data: My diva was, is, truly my girlfriend. She was, is, also my married (to me) "lover." Whose business is it, our being "lovers," and who else is licensed to call her a "lover"?

As to Nelson Mandala, we never read anything about him in the U.S. ("capitalist") press. Nor heard about him anywhere, though we both have been to his native Minnesota to speak there and report to a college in St. Paul. We haven't seen the official Nica press lately, which mentioned him only the one time, we were told, but only the independent and often closed down *La Prensa*, at the moment reopened under close watch, which had never mentioned him in the first place. . . .

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Northrop Frye

THE OVERSTANDING READER

The question has often been raised about the moral benefits of studying literature. Clearly the relation in which the reader is a subject looking at an object set against him is not one that will necessarily improve the personal character of the reader, unless he very much wants it to. This fact is particularly clear in painting, because of the accident that so many paintings can be bought and possessed instead of becoming the focus of a community. The narrator of Browning's poem "My Last Duchess," who has his wife murdered because she smiled at other people, but who cherished her picture which smiled only at him, was what is known as a cultivated man, but the cultivation had not done much for his moral sense.

In literature there is the factor of the difference, almost the opposition, between the kinetic appeal of rhetoric and the imaginative appeal of poetry. Rhetoric belongs to a moral, *quid agas* or "What should we do?" mode. Thus rhetoric does attempt to be a moral stimulus – usually a bad one, unfortunately, the stimulus to hatred being by far the easiest available – but literature does not act in this way, except through some historical accident, or unless (as in inspirational verse or propaganda novels) the works of literature involved are really disguised forms of rhetoric. And yet I think almost any serious writer, if asked what kind of contact he wanted to make with his public, would say that his aim had something to do with making his reader a different person from what he was before.

Two forms of identity are involved in studying a work of literature. There is identity *as*, which is a basis of ordinary knowledge, and is a matter of fitting individuals into classes. We know this creature to be a cat, we identify it as a cat, because we recognize it to be an individual of the class "cat." But, it will be objected, we are overlooking the uniqueness of the cat: there are millions of cats, every one quite discernibly different in appearance and temperament from this one. This is a kind of mental confusion which seldom affects the status of cats, where it is easier to understand the traditional distinction between *esse* and *essentia*, but it is constantly obscuring the theory of criticism. We never know the unique as such: uniqueness belongs to experience by itself. The contemplation of the literary structure as a representation, an individual of the class "poem," unites experience and knowledge.

There is also identity *with*, which has several dimensions. A metaphor of the "A is B" type expresses an identity *with* that is not found in ordinary experience. We do, however, experience a form of identity-with in time, as when I feel that I am identical with all the personalities I have been or had

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since birth. Identity in this context means unity with variety, as is also the identity in which one's hands and feet and head are identified by being parts of the same thing. Then again, the book I have just read is in a sense identified with me, having entered the continuum of my own life. Let us explore this conception of personally involving metaphor a little further.

I have never found any formula better to begin with on this topic than "the lunatic, the lover, and the poet" of Duke Theseus in *A Midsummer Night's Dream*. According to him, these three groups are compact of imagination, by which he means essentially seeing things that are not there. In our present context this means that they are the obvious groups of people who take metaphor, or identity-with, seriously. Let us start with the lover. There is a common stock of metaphors connected with two bodies becoming one flesh in sexual union, and the lover as poet revolves around these metaphors, though in a somewhat elliptical way. The one-flesh metaphor is biblical (Genesis 2:24), and of course the starting point of every human life is the identity of one flesh resulting from the meeting of two bodies, which makes the concern involved fairly immediate.

In Shakespeare's day it was generally assumed that the poet was a lover, and that if he was not he was probably a rather poor creature, and almost certainly a dull poet. That is, one of the chief sources for his inspiration was what I have just called an existential metaphor, the union with his mistress in which the experience of being one flesh, identical with someone else, supplied the generative power for his poetry. This union was nearly always "of imagination all compact": that is, it didn't happen. The great majority of Elizabethan poetic mistresses were as unavailable as Elizabeth: they were coy, proud, disdainful, "sworn to live chaste," like Romeo's Rosaline, married to someone else like Sidney's Stella, capricious or promiscuous. (The convention itself of course was centuries older.) Thus love poetry, and perhaps all poetry, is the child of the frustration of identity, a presence taking the place of or substituting for an enforced absence. Here, of course, the lover is the poet, not the reader, but the reader is usually assumed to be reading as a lover, and to share something of the experience going on.

When the union in one flesh does take place, there is still frustration, this time inherent in the brevity and the many accidents of the act, and above in the inability to forget that two people never really become one person. The standard example in English literature is Donne's "The Extasie," where some turns of phrase ("And yet the body is his book") indicate a connection in Donne's mind between the sex act and the writing of poetry. The connection is much strong in "The Canonization," where the two lovers:

> die and rise the same, and prove
> Mysterious by this love.

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Here "die" also has a connotation of sexual union, and we proceed again to literary metaphors, poetry being the result of imitating the model lovers who are "canonized," or made saints of the God of Love. "We'll build in sonnets pretty rooms," the poem says, a pun on "stanza" being concealed behind the last word. In Shakespeare's "Phoenix and the Turtle," what Donne calls "the phoenix riddle" reappears, with female phoenix and male turtle as partners in a union which is again both death and sexual consummation. There is no book or sonnet mentioned here, but Reason, horrified by the metaphorical union of two in one, pronounces a "threnody" reducing the act to simple death.

The love poet employs the assumed or hypothetical identity of the metaphor, which asks us at least to consider the possibility that A and B are the same person even when we know, whatever knowing may mean in this connection, that they aren't. The lover goes further than the reader into actual experience: he has felt what kind of truth is involved in saying that two lovers united sexually are one person, however soon they have to settle for the reality of being two bodies again. The lover is thus the guarantor, so to speak, of the reality of what the poet is talking about, poet and reader, as we said, being both assumed to know enough about love to feel that something more than a literary exercise is going on.

The medieval poets seem to have introduced the God of Love or Eros to Western poetry as a symbol of their cultural status that would just get by established authority. They also appear to have acted largely on their own initiative, drawing on Virgil and Ovid, and obviously they felt the psychological force of the assumption that creativity has a good deal to do with erotic drive, whether achieved, frustrated or sublimated. In this post-Freudian era we are less likely to be startled or put off by the suggestion that Eros creates the identity behind the imaginative identities of metaphor in poetry, counterpoint in music, composition in painting, proportion in sculpture and architecture. These last two arts even take us in the direction of the erotic appeal in mathematics, which Yeats speaks of in "The Statues," where he begins a poem on the erotic nature of Greek statuary with the words "Pythagoras planned it," Pythagoras being preeminently the philosopher of mathematics.

Behind the lover the administrative mind of Theseus sees nothing but lunatics. But, as noted earlier, there are infinite varieties of madness, some of them traditional attributes of poetry, or activities closely related to poetry. There are the Asian shamans, the sibyls and prophets of the ancient Western world, the cults of divine possession like those of Dionysus that have given us the word "enthusiasm"; there are the mystics and the visionaries. There are also identifications with the natural environment, with society or a social group, or with a predecessor in the literary tradition. In all this there is one factor of the greatest importance. In every such form of identification there is a renunciation of egocentric or subjective identity.

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There are certain contexts in which one can no longer speak of oneself as a subject. One cannot, for example, say "I am a wise and good man," without suggesting that one is nothing of the kind, because such predicates as wisdom and goodness will not fit into any sentence starting with "I am." Even Jesus had reservations about being called good (Matthew 19:17). Creation appears to be another of these contexts. We have previously suggested that ordinary waking consciousness is not creative; the reason seems to be that it is ego-centered. Keats speaks of the poet's "negative capability"; Blake calls himself the "secretary" of his poems; Eliot uses his well-known figure of the catalyzer, indicating, like all the poets who have invoked Muses and similar figures, that he is not the maker of the poem but simply the place where it comes to being; Mallarmé speaks of his vision as developing "through what used to be me."

Montaigne, a writer unlikely to be accused of obsession, says:

> I have no more made my book than my book has made me; a book consubstantial with its author, concerned only with me, a vital part of my life; not having an outside and alien concern like all other books.

The concluding phrase we perhaps may view with some detachment: every author regards his book as different from all other books. But the use of the term "consubstantial," the term Luther uses for the relation of the elements of the Eucharist to the body of Christ, could hardly tell us more clearly that Montaigne, who seems the most personal and accessible of writers, is not talking to us at all, even though he uses the convention of direct speech. He is giving us his book instead of himself, or, more accurately, giving us his book, which is both himself and not himself.

The discoverer of the principle that all verbal structures descend from mythological origins was Vico, and Vico's axiom was *verum factum*: what is true for us is what we have made. But the phrase is less simple than that rendering of it may suggest. What is true for us is a creation in which we have participated, whether we have been in on the making of it or on the responding to it. We are accustomed to think, rather helplessly, of whatever presents itself to us objectively as reality. But if we wake up in the morning in a bedroom, everything we see around us that is real, in contrast to our dreams, is a human creation, and whatever human beings have made human beings can remake. I take it that is something of what Wallace Stevens means by his "supreme fiction," the reality which is real because it is a created fiction, and recognized to be such.

The type of identification we have been calling existential metaphor may also be called, following Heidegger, "ecstatic." The word *ecstatic* means,

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approximately, standing outside oneself: a state in which the real self, whatever reality is and whatever the self is in this context, enters a different order of things from that of the now dispossessed ego. There are many varieties of this ecstatic state in the arts: for example, we expect an actor to be ecstatically identified with his role in a play. It seems clear from all accounts that the ecstatic state, no less than the erotic state, is one that one cannot remain in very long. Many writers who enter it in their great moments develop a ferocious ego for their rest periods.

The imaginative element in the poetic means that all the doors of perception in the psyche, the doors of dream and fantasy as well as of waking consciousness, are thrown open. This is the point at which the metaphor of seeing a poem becomes inadequate, and the word *vision*, suggesting a greater intensity of the same thing, becomes more appropriate. Vision also suggests the fragmentary and the temporary, not necessarily something seen steadily and whole, to paraphrase Arnold, but more frequently providing only an elusive and vanishing glimpse. Glimpse of what? To try to answer this question is to remove it to a different category of experience. If we knew what it was, it would be an object perceived in time and space. And it is not an object, but something uniting the objective with ourselves.

Our metaphors of hearing followed by seeing are beginning to give out at this point, and need reinforcing by other metaphors. We may characterize the following of a narrative by the metaphor of a horizontal line, and of the thematic contemplation of the complete structure by a vertical one. In looking at a picture we are looking mainly up and down. But if narrative is metaphorically horizontal, irony is built into the very conception of narrative. The fact that there must be a last page and a final "cadence," or falling away from the reader, infuses narrative from the beginning with the sense that the reader is above and the action of the text below. This sense of irony increases in proportion to the degree of irony in the text itself: we have irony in tragedy, for example, when we know more about what is going on than the characters do. In an age when practically all narrative, fictional or otherwise, is ironic in its pervading tone, the reader must be in possession of some norm of vision that oversees what he sees. There are various paradoxes in criticism, designed to show how deeply the reader is involved in the irony of what he reads, suggesting that no such norm really exists. But without it irony could not make its point as irony. There is one consciousness that subjects itself to the text and understands, and another that, so to speak, overstands. It is only the possession of the latter that makes the operation of reading worthwhile: without it a reader is a pedant who understands but does not comprehend.

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Leonard Kriegel

IN KAFKA'S HOUSE

Ever since I took sick with polio at the age of eleven, I have been terrified of waking up one morning to discover I am once again helpless. I am not talking about the prospect of stroke or heart attack or cancer. No matter how life-threatening, ordinary illness is simply among the risks one takes by having been born and growing older. I am talking about my nightmare of an enforced isolation, in which I am held captive by the ability of others to structure the aftereffects of my disease.

One can be imprisoned by the world and yet not stand within it. At the heart of my dread, I see a human being begging for the space he occupies and the air he breathes. The vision consumes me, even as fantasy. I cannot rid myself of the belief that a man has the right to hold on to the self he has created.

My idea that I have created a self may simply be another false god I choose to worship. I recognize that. Still, the prospect of being forced to function as others command me to function is terrifying. I think I could lie without moving, a sentient vegetable, if only I still believed I could maintain allegiance to my idea of who I was and what I had made of my life. I know, of course, that every man and woman desires a strong sense of self. But the prospect of discovering that one's capacity for living can be defined by others is particularly haunting to a man who has been conscious of his helplessness at some other point in his life.

A few months ago, my terrified vision of helplessness was reawakened as two old friends – a husband and wife visiting the States from the Netherlands – told me of what had recently happened to their oldest son. Their story had the effect of making me tremble, so intense was the rage it called forth.

Let me call him Michael. We are curiously tied together, Michael and I, each of our lives radically altered by a physical handicap. We first met when I was the Fulbright lecturer at the University of Leiden during the academic year 1964-65. My wife and I and our two-year-old son were frequent visitors at Michael's parents' house. Michael was then a young man who had just turned nineteen, twelve years younger than I was. We would talk in a Dutch-English patois. Michael was intent not only on what the future held in store for him but on the very visible fact that, like him, I was physically crippled. Having lost the use of my legs, I walked on double long-legged braces and crutches.

Michael's own handicap was considerably more severe. He had been born in the early summer of 1945, soon after the war in Europe came to an

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end. His mother had been pregnant with him during the terrible final winter of that war, what people old enough to remember in Western Holland still call the *Hungerwinter*. Men and women crawled in the fields and ate tulip bulbs to keep from starving. The inadequate nutrition available to his mother was what physicians blamed for the overwhelming genetic weakness in Michael's arms and legs.

I had already lived for two full decades with the effects of what my virus had done to me. Diligent exercise had given me considerable strength in my arms and shoulders. I could walk mile after mile on my crutches, the fifteen pounds of leather and steel strapped to my legs no more than a metaphor for my sense of power then. Michael's mobility was extremely limited. He was dependent upon his parents and his two younger brothers – both of them strong and athletic - to get around.

In August 1968, as Russian tanks rolled into Prague, I returned to the Netherlands for a second Fulbright year. By this time, my family had grown with the addition of another son. Once again, we were welcomed by Michael's family, and the two of us renewed our conversations about our lives and our struggles. I wasn't surprised when, a year later, soon after our return to New York, a letter from Michael announced his imminent marriage. It was a moving letter, but I still wish there was some way to write this without speaking of it. Michael wanted me to know that my example had given him hope. He was ready to lead a "normal" life.

I am not a modest man. And I take a great deal of pride in what I have been able to make of my life despite formidable obstacles. But I never wanted to serve as anyone's model of how to live with a severe physical handicap. Looking back, however, it seems almost inevitable that I became such a model for Michael. His mother had translated my first book, an account of my encounter with the polio virus, into Dutch. And when he and I talked, Michael would speak quite openly about his feelings, his thoughts, his fears and ambitions, his crippled state. Just before we left Holland in June 1969, I learned that he had decided to study for the ministry. He had chosen to be "normal." With God's help, he wrote, he would taste the sacrament of marriage.

As a skeptic, I was more suspicious of God's help than was Michael. But in the letter I wrote back, I spoke of how splendidly he had come through, by which I meant not that he had "overcome his handicap" but that he had absorbed the pain of the cripple into his strength as a man. Michael understood what it had taken me years to learn – that a cripple validates his life by creating a sense of his selfhood out of physical pain and chaos. Of course, Michael was a Christian, and for a Christian suffering binds one to God. But Michael also understood that it was suffering which gave him the right to choose survival. A nonbeliever could only envy his capacity for faith. From my painfully secular position, the cripple's presence merely testified to

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a calculus of accident. One could offer assent to such mathematics, since one's assent was beside the point. Both believers and nonbelievers were powerless to change the way things were.

Over the next ten years, I corresponded with Michael's parents. And I heard news of Michael as I heard news of their other children. Once a Christmas card from Michael himself arrived. He offered his warmest wishes on the back of a photograph showing him sitting in an oversized armchair, misshapen legs jutting out from under him, surrounded by wife and two small children. Each of them is smiling.

Although he was, like me, a nonbeliever, Michael's father wrote to tell me that his son was minister of a small congregation in the Northeastern Netherlands. With a "normal" father's pride, he noted that Michael's sermons were more literate than his small-town congregation could know. He took pleasure, as I took pleasure, in the knowledge that Michael was getting on in the world.

In 1981, when I was again living in Europe, I visited Michael's parents in the small town on the Côte d'Or where they now had a summer home. Michael, I learned, had separated from his wife. But his parents believed that they might yet reconcile their differences. And Michael and his wife did reconcile. But I lost touch with his parents until this past February, when they wrote that they were coming to America for a few weeks. In April, they spent three days with us in New York. And it was then that I heard the story that rekindled the primary terror of my imagination – the threat of helpless isolation imposed by someone one loves.

As I listened to Michael's parents, I felt anger, then rage. And then I felt something stronger than anger or rage, a naked throbbing fear that came from somewhere so deep inside me that it threatened sanity. Pathologies are bred in the bone. In literature, as Susan Sontag reminded us in *Illness as Metaphor*, illness is usually appropriate as an image. In life, however, it sets a cripple against his weakness and his strength.

Michael hadn't complained. He must have wondered sometimes what other fate might have been his. But that is not complaining, as anyone who is crippled knows. Perhaps as he lay in that room, imprisoned by the woman he had loved and the sons he had fathered, his mind entertained itself by conjuring up alternative lives. But the Michael I remember always focused not on what the world owed him but on what he owed it. I suspect he assumed responsibility for any suffering he had endured. He had, after all, "allowed" himself to be conceived during that war-ravaged winter of hunger. And I wonder whether, as he lay on the floor of that room, he saw himself as having been created in the image of God. Perhaps as a giant slug. Or as the leavings on the plate. Visions abound. The fate that had been meted out was the fate he somehow deserved. Michael would live with it. Life had taught him that he had no choice.

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A world framed by nightmare is a world framed by Kafka. I listened to Michael's parents, and I did not sob or cry out with rage. I closed my eyes and watched a woman push a man in a wheelchair into a small room. She takes him from the chair, forces him to the mattress on the floor. Then she takes his crutches and his wheelchair from the room, locks the door. He is to be taught a lesson by his wife-jailer. Other than the mattress on the floor and a straw-seat chair that seems to have been lifted from a Van Gogh painting and placed in the corner of the room, there is no furniture. There is no bathroom. There is no washstand.

He hears his sons, now young men of fifteen and seventeen, move through the house. His sons ignore the closed door. Beyond it lies not their father but a thing defined by its relation to their mother. He may talk like a man. But his sons know that a man – even a minister of the gospel – is not merely speech. A man is a body, defining himself by the demands he makes upon the world. Michael demands nothing. Like Kafka's hunger artist, he finds himself more and more attracted to the aesthetics of starvation while he lies on the floor. His world has been turned inside out. His children are his guards, his wife is his jailer.

I remain purposefully calm as I listen. I envision Michael lying within the locked room, in his own dirt, measuring time in the mind's eyes. No television set, no books, no radio, no newspaper. He can listen to the sounds of his oldest son's guitar. The sound of the guitar soothes, makes him feel part of his family again. He smiles, as if he were once more surrounded by wife and sons, posing for a picture on a Christmas card. He closes his eyes. He recites verses from the Bible. He passionately preaches sermons to spellbound congregations.

But if he is God's voice, he can speak only in his imagination. For five days, punctually at three, his wife-jailer unlocks the door and shoves a tray into the room. Focusing his eyes on the tray, he forces his face to remain expressionless. His wife grimaces her displeasure at the sight of Michael on the floor, dissatisfied with what she has created. His solitary kingdom is defined anew by the glass of water, the bread, and the cheese on the tray. He does not crawl to the tray until she has closed and relocked the door. Michael eats.

His voice survives five days of hearing itself in the mind alone. It assumes the scale of Isaiah, Ezekial, of lamenting with Jeremiah. Never before had Michael felt comfortable with the Book of Ecclesiastes. It was always too Greek, too lacking in Christian hope. But now, in his enforced isolation, he transforms the Preacher word by word. As he lies alone on the mattress in the empty room, Michael is determined to endure. If he can outlast captivity, he will, he knows, again become human.

He hears wife and sons speaking with considerable agitation in the vestibule. He hears the front door slam. Silence descends on the house. Too

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weak simply to crawl, Michael twists and slithers to the door. He reaches up to touch the lock, and the door springs free. They have deliberately left it open. He moves to the entrance of the house, slithering to the front door. It, too, is unlocked. A neighbor spies him as he twists outside, slithering like a commando moving beneath barbed wire. The neighbor hesitantly approaches. Michael is covered with dirt. There is blood on his forehead, where he scraped it against the door jamb. He smells of feces and dried urine and sweat. The neighbor reaches down, touches him, furtively, as if Michael were some jelly-like blob. Michael smiles. The neighbor will telephone the police. No, Michael insists, better if he simply helped him get into the car.

He slithers to the car. With the neighbor cradling him, he gets inside. As he suspected, the door of the car has been left open. The keys wait in the ignition. Michael feels light-headed – from hunger, from his own smell, from the unexpected gift of freedom, from the outrage and distaste so visible on his neighbor's face. Michael turns the key, touches the specially constructed hand controls, smiles his gratitude at the neighbor, who angrily slams the car door shut. Michael drives off, no longer a captive.

He has been sentenced to helplessness. But he remains a believer. "People like us," I remember his saying as he told me of his decision to enter the ministry, "have been chosen to suffer for the rest of mankind. With our lives, God demonstrates his love for the world." I remember how I resisted the temptation to make some caustic comment about God's love. Instead, I told him that I believed men chose their fates by what was available to them at the time of their choosing. Michael was adamant. God, he insisted, had chosen him. And whether I knew it or not, he had chosen me, too. If so, I remember thinking at the time, his God was capricious enough to serve as ringmaster for this century's circus. But I didn't say anything. Michael was determined to survive. His faith was the price he paid for that survival.

Michael drove to the house of a parishioner, a woman his wife insisted he was sleeping with. He saw her only for work related to church projects. Better, I thought, as I listened to the story, if they had been sleeping together.

The woman bathes him, washing away the smell of captivity. She sets the table, listens to Michael say grace. Like the neighbor, she wants to call the police. Michael refuses. She must understand. He is a minister. He is a cripple. He is a burden. Without knowing it, he has read Kafka up close.

Thinking about that story makes me want to howl like a wounded animal, to stick my hand through glass. Thinking about that story makes me believe that only in the breaking does life make sense. I am fifty-five years old. I have created a life, built it piece by piece. And I can be thrust aside, locked away, made susceptible to the same terror as Michael was. I shiver as I envision myself in Michael's place. Reeking of humiliation, imprisoned by those one loves, tested by a calculating malevolence.

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I feel sanity threatened because Michael's nightmare is also mine. We are, Michael and I, creations of what Susan Sontag calls "a more onerous citizenship." It is not a citizenship one chooses. But endemic to the life one claims from the skewered ambitions and twisted dreams of one's actual life are the choices one makes. Citizens act, think, create.

In the struggle between sickness and health, the forces of light and the forces of darkness, Michael and I are simply soldiers in the ranks. Thomas Mann pits Hans Castorp and his cousin Joachim against one another in his great novel, *The Magic Mountain*. Hans is indolent in his willingness to allow disease to define his life; Joachim refuses to give in to what disease has made of him. Mann, always the master ironist, destroys Joachim because he insists on denying the defining power of disease. What infuriates me is not the vision of Michael lying in his own filth on a bare mattress in a bare room. What infuriates me is that the genetics that defined him made him so dependent upon others that his capacity to claim a self could be stolen by a bitter wife and fearful sons.

When I was thirteen and returned to the neighborhood from two years in an upstate hospital, I remember my mother walking into the apartment one September afternoon, face tear-streaked and ashen. The butcher's wife had just told her that my illness was God's judgement – on her. The butcher's wife was known throughout the neighborhood as "not right in the head," a knowledge that should have made what she said easily dismissible. Sitting in the sawdust-strewn butcher shop, childless, she would knit, our own Madame de Farge, mumbling incantations in Yiddish to placate a God of vengeance and to impose order on an evil-crazed universe. Her eyes would blank out the world, and they would light up with the stare of the mad.

Mad or sane, the butcher's wife had touched my mother's center, as Kafka touches our center. For she had voiced precisely what my mother herself believed about disease in her own fear-ravaged heart. Illness was judgement. Accident, illness, war, famine, disease – punishments visited upon one by the master of the universe.

To call this "superstition" is useless. For the butcher's wife and my mother simply believed what far more sophisticated and rational people believe even today about disease: Through illness, justice can be meted out. The accidental victim turns out not to be a victim by accident. It is not the meaning of illness that is beyond understanding. The meaning can be easily understood. For to dwell in Kafka's House is to discover that judgement lives beside one. And to be a "victim of disease" is to be tested, tried, made "better," punished, reborn.

Anyone who has dealt with a long-term illness or accident soon recognizes the extent to which his own view of it is judgemental. In Kafka's House, a sense of mystery does not eliminate cause-and-effect. One loses one's body to disease, but one also loses it to memory. And it becomes in-

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creasingly difficult, as one focuses on that loss, not to read into it some greater significance than what it merits. Writer and physician and theologian join hands in assigning responsibility. Disease has somehow been welcomed, accident has somehow been sought out. Psychosomatic illness may not be as fashionable an intellectual theory today as it was twenty years ago. But we continue to speak of disease-welcoming personalities and accident-prone people. A modern vocabulary makes "scientific" the fears and superstitions operating on both the butcher's mad wife and my own judgement-obsessed mother.

As a believer, did Michael view his treatment at the hands of his jailer-wife and guard-sons as another trial, a further test, to be endured? Pain cannot be allowed to be fortuitous. Michael and his wife and sons were actors together in some mysterious metaphysical drama. In some dark corner of his mind, Michael achieved purgation. He had suffered, he had endured – and his suffering and endurance were meaningful. They proved him worthy.

As Michael sleeps now alongside his new wife – yes, the parishioner who cleansed him – does he remember that disease, too, is a sort of sharing, a communion of sorts? Does he recognize how it inflicts itself on others?

When Michael first told me he had decided upon the ministry, I remember asking him whether he had read Kafka. He hadn't. I hope he never does. Let him conceive of himself as an original. On the blank page, Kafka stands more powerful than the father he created. To the tubercular writer, Gregor Samsa embodies the ordinary drabness of suffering.

Illness can be a metaphor only to those determined to remain ignorant of its truth. Susan Sontag was painfully accurate in that. And by the same token, illness can be therapeutic only to those determined to avoid its tedium.

The mathematical probability of illness or accident can be created by any number of possible factors. For Michael, the war. For me, a prospectively innocent two weeks at summer camp. A reminder for all philosophers of chance. On the bus going to camp, we were seated according to height. I was a tall boy, taller than the two friends from the neighborhood I was going to camp with. I was made to sit next to another tall boy. His name was Jerry, he had watery blue eyes, and by the time we arrived at the camp I had invited him to share a bunk with me and my two friends from the neighborhood. Eleven days later, Jerry and I were fighting to stay alive in a small country hospital. Jerry died. I lost the use of my legs to the virus. My two friends returned to the city untouched. Was it simply a time when a capricious God or a quixotic fate had it in for taller boys? Would shorter boys have their turn next year? Did Jerry and I share an "inclination" to embrace the disease-carrying virus? Were my two neighborhood friends better prepared to resist its siren song? A simple cast of the dice is never enough: judgement demands more magical incantations.

Think of what our age has created from such spiritual voodoo. In the

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name of diagnosis, the mind has been burdened with the task of saving us from illness. "Canst thou administer to a mind diseased?" cries MacBeth. In our time, he would subscribe to a journal of holistic medicine. Think healthy and you are healthy. The intensity of our interest in quackery staggers the rational mind. We peddle cures for virtually every condition known to man – cancer, acne, heart attack, impotence, stroke, hair loss, pneumonia, bad breath. We are deluged by books urging us to eat our way to health, to will our way to health, to exercise our way to health, to fuck our way to health. Physicians vie with one another for the chance to treat the soul rather than the body – or, better yet, to treat the body through treating the soul.

And we veteran denizens of Kafka's House, even we are absorbed not by the pathology of disease but by the psychology of those who "allowed" disease to enter their lives. How curious that it is Michael, not his wife, whose motives I probe. The bearer of the virus is of little interest; the victim commands our attention. In Kafka's House, one learns how to view terror rather than the terrorized with compassion. Just as in certain writings about the Holocaust the implicit question addressed to the Jews is "How could *you* let this happen?" so Michael discovers that he has been condemned to answer his wife-jailer and guard-sons as they cry out, "How could *you* allow us to do this?"

Ours is a century that views weakness as sin. Even those whose lives are intertwined with the lives of the weak become victims of their victimization. "Why me?" compels "Why them?" The victims of the victim become the significant bearers of his pain. His scars – the useless legs, the weak arms, the bent shoulders – are their burden. The mind of the jailer haunts the prisoner. Michael's true shame is for what he has done to those who once loved him.

It has been almost three years since Michael last spoke to his sons. Curiously, I can understand that. They lack the intensity of his obsession. And they lack his belief, his sense of having been selected to suffer for the rest of humanity. They *are* the rest of humanity. Kafka's father is the father they desire, created as need dictates. To ask them to love their father is to ask them to deny themselves. His ravaged body will forever rebuke their need for strength.

What makes their resentment understandable is that they feel trapped. Disease truly is a sharing. Only its burdens and rewards are unequal. Think of Michael's two sons, men themselves now, aware from the time they were toddlers that they were physically more powerful than the man they called "father." A father who is God's solitary beggar rebukes the very power they seek. What they desire is a father against whom revolt might be conventional, a father who seems powerful and overwhelming, a father like Kafka's father. What they have gotten is a father who inspires in them rage intense enough to create its own metaphysics of injustice.

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And even as I rage at her, I try to see that bare room through the eyes of Michael's jailer, his wife. Do I condemn her inability to live with her husband's bargains with God? Was locking Michael in that room her confession of failure? The idea is as soothing as it is obscene, as if Michael had to be imprisoned and humiliated, left in the dirt and smell of his affliction, so that his wife could see herself as something other than servant to his needs. Did she, I wonder, share Michael's sense that Christians are repositories of suffering? That their burden is the world's salvation?

Despite Susan Sontag's superb essay, writers will continue to use illness as metaphor. Disease so easily springs out of control. And what better language for condemnation, for evil, for receiving one's just and unjust reward or punishment? Cancer, heart attack, AIDS, and diseases yet to be discovered – a stream of metaphors, all promising retribution against hedonism and excess. The body's unconscious revenge upon the depths of depravity of the modern body.

And since we are creatures of paradox, we will employ the metaphors even while we continue to live in a culture that obligates man to be "healthy," a culture in which all disease can be withstood, conquered through the exertion of the individual will.

And perhaps it should be. To be "struck down" is a most human victimization. Given the keys to Kafka's House, one approaches his prospective tenancy there prepared to confront the question of what made one's residence possible. "The romantic idea that the disease expresses the character," Susan Sontag writes, "is invariably extended to assert that the character causes the disease – because it has not expressed itself." Even for Kafka, the voice of tuberculosis demanded that he reject disease and assert his longing for health. How he envied the self-confident and "normal," those who had neither the time nor the patience required by disease. To claim power is also to claim health.

And the man who is "successful" at creating a life out of the aftereffects of disease discovers that he must, sooner or later, fight against an inflated notion of what it is he has achieved. When a mutual friend praised Franz Rozenzweig's courage in living with the pain and suffering inflicted on him by a long struggle with cancer, Freud, doomed to undergo the same long struggle, is reported to have said, "What else can he do?" Freud understood that the real question each of us must answer is no different from the question "normal" men and women face. What are the terms with which one lives with disease?

For those who have successfully "rehabilitated" themselves feel the temptation to make disease self-referential. The man who competes in a wheelchair marathon does not view his effort as a mockery of form but as a way of turning stigma upon itself. Having "come through," having "overcome his handicap," he invests what he has done with a morality of its own. "I

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came, I saw, I conquered!" can so easily be transformed into, "I suffered, I overcame, I endured!" It is not, finally, the life one seeks to redeem – it is the disease. For it is the disease that challenges the self to be "better" than what it was.

Hans Castorp discovers that he must affirm the power of the idea that disease has snatched him from the jaws of health if he is to be made conscious. In seeking shelter in Kafka's House, he deserts the humdrum and banal for the possibility of the erotic and exciting. Made physically smaller, the self suddenly looms larger. To be doomed by illness is to learn how to refuse the temptation of the ordinary and settled. Were I given to looking for signs, I would point out that as each of them came to the end of his life, Kafka and Hemingway switched roles – the one insisting on the need to "overcome" disease and accept the healthy, the other sticking a shotgun in his mouth to blow his "healthy" head away.

ANATOLE BROYARD

1920 – 1990

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Louis Simpson

A LEAVE OF ABSENCE

I had been awarded a grant and was able to take a year off from teaching. And it was time for a change of scene. London seemed a good idea – there'd be no trouble finding schools for the children. Through an ad in the *Times* we rented an apartment in Primrose Hill. The ad said that it was close to Regent's Park and a few minutes by bus or underground to the middle of London.

We couldn't move in before the end of June, so we thought we would spend the time between travelling. I had a friend in Edinburgh, Robin Lorimer, who had edited my book on James Hogg. We flew to London, spent a few days sightseeing, and took a train to Edinburgh.

The last time I had been there, doing research for the book, was in March. It was wet and cold. I shivered in the streets and it was scarcely better in my room. On Sundays everything was closed – I spent one Sunday in bed waiting for Monday to come. But this time, thanks to *James Hogg: A Critical Study*, doors opened as if by magic, and we discovered that behind the gray stones of Edinburgh a lively, convivial life was going on. "Have another slice of beef," said the hostess. "No thanks," I said, "it's very good but . . ." "I didna doot the roast," she said, giving me a lesson in Scottish manners: you don't compliment the hostess on her cooking, it is always good.

We traveled to Inverness and the field of Culloden. I had read that there was a connection between my ancestors and a clan that fought in the battle. It had been a disaster, half-naked clansmen running onto English bayonets. They were buried at Culloden in a mass grave. Afterwards the English hunted the rebels among the hills, and some were shipped to the colonies in chains. That may have been how my ancestor came to Jamaica.

On the other hand, he might have been a farmer who couldn't make a living in Scotland. If so, he must have been desperate – Europeans who went to the West Indies were likely to die of fever or some other tropical disease.

We traveled across the Highlands to the Isle of Skye. There among the hills with their thistles and patches of heather you feel that, in all the centuries, you may be the first to stand on this particular spot. Cities cease to exist or have not yet come into being. An immense solitude broods over the hills. There are no curtains between you and it.

We moved into the apartment in Primrose Hill, found a grocer and butcher and arranged to have milk delivered. Chalk Farm lay in one direction, Regent's Park in another. At night the wind brought the howling of wolves in the zoo.

There actually was a hill. People took their lunch there, children flew

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kites, and one day there was a gathering of Druids, people in white robes who walked in a circle uttering incantations. Afterwards they repaired to the pub on the corner, the one with pictures of Edwardian women. They were the mistresses of the Prince of Wales, later Edward VII. The grand courtesans of the turn of the century looked down with an air, keeping their royal secrets.

The pub was a meeting place for writers and people who worked for the BBC or did something in the theater. Anecdotes overheard in the pub furnished material for articles, television scripts, and novels.

A poet once said, "Don't send a poet to London." He may have been thinking of wet streets and umbrellas. But though London may not be a good place for a poet, it offers a journalist or novelist many opportunities. A writer can make a living by writing a radio script one week, an article for *The New Statesman* the next. In the States, many writers work for universities; this makes for timidity and the writing of useless books.

There was one thing, however, I didn't like about the English literary scene . . . their dislike of Americans. A good number of English intellectuals were Marxists, and the American with his idea of democracy and belief in free enterprise was their enemy. They found a curious ally in the public school-educated Englishman who hated American manners. The American didn't know his place. Some of these gentlemen would rather sell State secrets to the Russians than see American tourists occupying the best seats in the house.

This reminds me of a story. Two thousand years after the Crucifixion Jesus was born again in Bethlehem. He grew up as he had before, an outstanding Yeshiva student and a credit to his parents. When he came to man's estate he took up public speaking and performing miracles: he healed the halt, the lame, and the blind. His fame spread throughout Israel . . . it was said that he had fed a multitude on a few biscuits and sardines. He traveled around the world, drawing crowds wherever he went.

Finally he came to England, and people flocked to the Albert Hall to hear him speak. They were greatly impressed, especially when he told them that he had raised the dead. When he finished speaking, there was a question period. A hand went up in the audience. "We know," said the Englishman, "that you are wise beyond belief and that you have performed miracles. We are even willing to admit that you are the son of God. But were you born in England? What school did you go to?"

I often went to the London Library in St. James's Square. It was a fine library – they allowed you to take out first editions. I wasn't writing poetry . . . in all the time we stayed in England I wrote only one poem, and it was set in the States. I could write only about things that mattered to me personally, and my fate wasn't bound up with England's, so to speak. But I could do some reading and write prose . . . an article on American poetry titled,

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"Advice to the English," notes for the new edition of a textbook.

Pound mentions the London Library. In the Great War, T. E. Hulme borrowed some books from the library and took them to the front:

> and a shell buried 'em in a dug-out,
> And the library expressed its annoyance

There was something admirable about a library that wouldn't accept the Great War as an excuse for not returning books in good condition.

"England expects . . . " The attitude was typical of England as a whole. They weren't in any hurry to be friendly, like the Americans, but once you were a member you had a definite standing, and they gave you the benefit of the doubt. You could let a bill go unpaid for three months without getting a nasty letter from the company. But if you turned out to be the kind of person who didn't live up to the trust they had placed in you . . .

I felt a certain guilt for receiving so many benefits and not paying taxes. A strike relieved that feeling: for a week we sat in darkness lighted only by candles and stood in line for candles at a shop down the road. People were cheerful about it, especially the old . . . it was like the blackout during the war. Then everyone had pulled together . . . so different from London now with its teddyboys and Wogs, and tourists elbowing you to get on the bus.

That year the Oxford University Press published a book of my poems. It was reviewed in the English papers, and I was invited to give poetry readings. I read at the Poetry Society in Earls Court Road and traveled to Manchester and Newcastle. At the Morden Tower in Newcastle the audience came from a bar downstairs and sat around on the floor. It was a nice change from reading at a university.

Once or twice when I gave a poetry reading I was asked why I used colloquial speech and occasionally a cliché. Apparently they hadn't read Chaucer. The English idea of a poem was an essay in rhyme. It did not go beyond prose ideas into something imagined.

I read with Seamus Heaney on Thames Television. Germaine Greer was also on the program. She talked about Sylvia Plath . . . Sylvia was a victim of male chauvinism. This was why she committed suicide.

People were talking about Sylvia Plath, especially in Primrose Hill, for this was where she had lived and killed herself, in a house with a plaque stating that Yeats had lived there. People who had known her dined out on their version of the events leading to her death. A critic said that the only kind of poetry that could be taken seriously these days, after the concentration camps and the atom bomb, was "extremist," the kind of poetry Sylvia Plath had written. He placed her with other poets – Robert Lowell was the best known – who wrote directly about their lives. They spoke of insanity,

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failed marriages, abortions.

In the States this kind of writing was called confessional. It was the opposite of what I thought poetry should be . . . a work of imagination.

There was a Buddhist Society in London. Every week I traveled with my wife to 58 Eccleston Square for meditation sessions. They were led by Christmas Humphreys, who founded the Society and had written a number of books on Buddhism.

He was also a judge, and his father had been a judge before him. This led to a misunderstanding on my part. A judge named Humphreys had presided at famous trials, among them the trial of Mrs. Rattenbury and her lover, George Stoner. This judge spoke of Mrs. Rattenbury in such scathing terms that although the jury found her innocent of her husband's murder, after the trial she walked down to a stream and stabbed herself repeatedly in the heart with a knife.

I thought this judge was Christmas Humphreys, and I wondered how he had found the peace of Buddha. But consulting *The Dictionary of National Biography* I found that he was Sir Travers Humphreys, Christmas Humphreys's father. The dictionary said that he believed that capital and corporal punishment helped to diminish crime and that "too much emphasis on the comfort of prisoners encouraged it."

I still wondered how it was possible for a Buddhist to be a judge. But Christmas Humphreys was not intransigent like his father. When we meditated we had to sit straight as boards, not letting the mind wander. But afterwards he was approachable. I told him that I would like to take my wife and children to see a trial at the Old Bailey. He said that we could come one day when he was on the bench.

We went on the appointed day. At first the policeman at the door wouldn't let us in . . . children were not admitted. But when we said we were friends of Mr. Justice Humphreys he admitted us at once.

"Don't expect anything exciting to happen," I warned Annie and Tony, "it'll probably be traffic tickets." We sat and looked around. When I was a boy looking at the books in my father's library there were pictures of the Old Bailey:

> 'Twas London's Old Bailey and so crowded is the court,
> Excitement is stamped on each face.
> There's Lords of the Land and Ladies so grand,
> To hear a sensational case.

The famous trials held more drama than most novels. The case of Hawley Harvey Crippen who fled on an ocean liner with his typist, Miss Le Neve, disguised as a boy . . . They were overtaken by Chief Inspector Dew traveling on a faster ocean liner. The "Brides in the Bath" murders . . .

The first case today was that of a man arrested for burglary. He was

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a hardened criminal with a record of similar offenses, and our friend the judge packed him off with a stiff sentence. Next came a young man who was charged with attempted murder. With his business suit and neatly brushed hair he looked like a clerk.

And that was what he proved to be. But his manner of life was unusual. He had been living in a flat with other young people. They elected him to be their leader and gave him a sword as the symbol of authority. On a floor above lived one they referred to as "the strong man" . . . he had been the strong man in a circus. It happened that the strong man and the young people on the floor below had arguments about one thing and another. One day the young man started upstairs with the sword and met the strong man coming down. They met on a landing and the sword went through the strong man.

Counsel for the defense said that the prisoner had not made a thrust with the sword . . . he had only been carrying it, and the strong man fell forward on the point and impaled himself. It was as absorbing as *Rashomon* and went on for hours. The strong man was called to the stand and came forward, stooping as he walked. He may have been the only living man, in this day and age, to have been run through with a sword.

At the end the judge said that the prisoner appeared to be a young man of good character . . . he held a job in the city and there was no record of previous offenses. He was therefore letting him go with a caution.

We emerged from the Old Bailey wrung out. Talk about traffic tickets!

We were driving with Seamus when we saw a man coming out of a pub. "It's my father," Seamus said, "I haven't seen him in months." He stopped the car and got out to speak to his father.

We were driving to Derry. The writing on walls said that Ulster was prepared to fight. We were stopped at a roadblock by British soldiers. They were in Northern Ireland to prevent Irish Catholics and Protestants from killing each other. They made us get out and identify ourselves, and searched the car for weapons.

Seamus left us at the college in Derry and drove back to Belfast. I was to give a poetry reading. Halfway through the reading a bomb went off in the distance, rattling windows. In a few minutes there was another. The audience didn't turn a hair . . . apparently they were accustomed. This was not being reported in the English papers. They spoke of violence but not that there was practically a civil war in Northern Ireland.

We were driven to the next reading by a man who had been sent to fetch us. The landscape was growing dark, and I had an ominous feeling. It took me a while to realize why . . . this was where I had been stationed during the war. We were infantry replacements waiting to be assigned to a regular outfit. We spent our days being instructed in close combat and the use of explosives, skills that would be required in the forthcoming invasion of the

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Continent. In the evenings we went to Portrush to drink half-and-half in a pub. If anyone had told me that one day I would return to this place of my own free will!

The reading took place at night. The audience sat bolt upright . . . they might have been cased in armor. I read serious poems, humorous poems, and made off-the-cuff remarks, but nothing seemed to work . . . the faces showed no expression. So I did what I had never done before . . . I stopped reading poems and asked what was the matter. What had they expected?

They said that their existence was being threatened by the Catholics. This was what concerned them. Then why, I couldn't help wondering, had they come to hear poems? But we discussed the situation. When I spoke of the shooting of Catholics by the British army on the day that had been named "Black Sunday," a man in the audience corrected me. "We don't call it that," he said, "we call it Good Sunday." I was glad that my wife and I were leaving the next day.

At Seamus's house in Belfast we heard the Catholic side of the story. When he was coming home at night he would be stopped and questioned . . . the ones who questioned him were his neighbors. He was thinking of moving to the Catholic south.

He drove us to the station . . . we were taking the train to Dublin. On the way he handed me a large envelope. It contained a poem he had signed for me as a parting gift. I thanked him, and when we got out of the car I put the envelope in my suitcase.

We approached the entrance to the station. The army was out in force . . . there had been a new wave of bombings. One of the soldiers looking over the crowd picked out a suspicious face. He stepped in front of me and told me to open the suitcase.

It was full of dirty laundry . . . shirts, underwear, and socks. "What is that?" he said, and pointed to the envelope. I said, "A poem," thinking this would be the end of it. But he tucked the automatic rifle under his arm, reached for the envelope, and took out the sheet of paper. It was what I had always feared, a critic with a machine gun. But the sentiments must have been innocent. . . . He put the poem back in the envelope, replaced it in the suitcase, and waved me on.

We told the story in London, but the people seated at the table were in a hurry to tell an Irish story of their own. The restraint on which English men and women pride themselves was thrown overboard when they spoke of Ireland. A woman who was important in theater circles said that the Irish came to England to make good wages and take advantage of the free medical service, and went back to Ireland without paying taxes. Another of the well-bred people at the table said that the Irish used their bathtubs to keep coal in.

BBC television staged a discussion of Ireland as a trial at Bar with

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three judges seated on the Bench. A rule was laid down at the start: there were to be no references to the past, only to the present trouble. Apparently it had not occurred to anyone at the BBC that British judges in wigs and gowns deciding what to do about Ireland might be a cause of the trouble. Or that in Ireland present and past are inseparable.

To walk on a road in Ireland or sit by the water is to be conscious of the past. These stones are where a monastery used to stand, that field is where the rebels were killed. Their ever-present consciousness of the past makes for poetry . . . the writing of a Yeats, a Patrick Kavanagh, a Seamus Heaney.

We meant to stay for a year . . . we stayed for two. But we had to leave the apartment . . . it was cramped and dark . . . the room where we did most of our living was below street level. We found a house for rent around the corner. It had three floors and light came through the curtains.

The longer we stayed in England, the more there was to see. We traveled to Bath to see the Roman ruins and to Stratford to see Peter Brook direct Shakespeare. We went to Richmond to see the palace and Kew to see the flowers. One Sunday we attended a service at Magnus Martyr close by the Thames. As *The Waste Land* said, the walls held "Inexplicable splendour of Ionian white and gold."

On another day we were in Little Gidding, and this too was as Eliot described it:

> you leave the rough road
> And turn behind the pig-sty to the dull facade
> And the tombstone.

A visitors' book in the chapel asked you to pray for some who were sick and others who were troubled. Some lines by Eliot were on display to remind you that there are more important things than sightseeing:

> you are not here to verify,
> Instruct yourself, or inform curiosity
> Or carry report. You are here to kneel
> Where prayer has been valid.

An appointment book that somehow has survived tells me that I gave a poetry reading at the Hasmonean School; that I saw Ted Hughes and his wife for lunch; that I recorded poems for the Greater London Arts Council; that I had a drink with Derwent May; that I read for "Poetry International" at Queen Elizabeth Hall and at "The Pindar of Wakefield" in Grays Inn Road.

With Tony Rudolph and Dannie Abse I took part in a "festival of the

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arts" at the Westminster Synagogue. We were shown the rooms that contained the Sacred Scrolls. There were 1,564 Scrolls, each representing a community in Bohemia or Moravia that had been destroyed by the Germans. But the Germans had preserved the Scrolls, perhaps with a view to having a museum of Jewish life.

In 1964 the Scrolls were brought from Czechoslovakia to London. They were numbered, placed in racks, and repaired so as to be usable. Hundreds of requests for a Scroll had been received from synagogues all over the world. A scribe was sitting at a table repairing a damaged Scroll. He wrote slowly, dipping his pen in ink that had been blessed by a rabbi.

Ron and Fay Weldon lived in the house next door. Fay had written a novel and was writing another . . . also a script for a television series. She sat in the kitchen over cups of tea, smoking cigarettes. She would get up to attend to one of the children.

I saw her recently in New York. She was on a tour arranged by her American publisher to promote her latest novel. We met at a reception being held in her honor at a bar in lower Manhattan. She was about to start on her journey west and looked as if she were being cast adrift. Miriam was with me; she told Fay which of her novels she liked best, and Fay looked surprised . . . you don't expect to meet someone who has actually read your books. She wanted us to stay but we couldn't . . . we live far out on the Island, a two hours' drive, and had to be starting back.

Fay reminded me that when I was living next door I gave her a bit of advice . . . a talking-to, in fact. I told her that she had introduced too many characters at the beginning of her novel. She confused the reader. I told her that she mustn't do that again.

I can see myself talking and Fay listening, her eyes half-closed, a curl of smoke going up from the cigarette in her hand. While I am giving her my advice she is thinking how it would sound in the mouth of a character in a novel. A critic. Writers can find a use for everything . . . even advice.

I did three broadcasts for the BBC. The subject was American poetry, and they rounded up some American actors to read the poems I used as examples. There are Americans living permanently in London who work for radio and television when an American accent is needed.

After each recording we would go out to a pub frequented by BBC people and have a pint or two or three. I was settling into London, feeling quite at home, when it was time to leave.

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VARIETY

Edith Kurzweil

CIRCUS IN MADRID

"You didn't come to Madrid for a conference," said José Antonio Guimbernat, my friend and President of the Spanish Commission on Human Rights, when looking at the five-hundred-page program of the meetings of the International Sociological Association (ISA), "you came to attend a circus." But even the Ringling Brothers have no more than five or seven rings at a time. The sociologists who came to the congress, which met between July 9th and 13th, had to choose among one of forty-two working groups, five thematic symposia, twenty ad hoc committees, and business meetings – during each of the five daily sessions which convened between 9 a.m. and 10 p.m. Or they could get together with members of "Other Associations." Each of these "entities" met between four and eight times. Over 4,500 persons were listed on the program – anywhere from one to six times – although no more than 3,000 of them actually showed up. And another 4,000 to 5,000 people came, many of them students and faculty from Madrid and other Spanish universities.

Sociology was a discipline *non grata* under the Franco regime, and now that the Congress was being held in Madrid the organizers were full of praise for their countrymen, not only for having set up the discipline but for having convinced the ISA to hold the Congress in Spain. In fact, this was only the first indication that national pride would compete with overarching international aims.

These aims were undercut by the fact that the forty-five pages of names at the end of the five-pound program tome did not note any way of contacting the people one wanted to see. There was no register that listed where anyone stayed, nor how one could get in touch with friends. One ran into them accidentally or not at all, and one socialized or talked "business" with whomever one happened to encounter upon walking from one of the four buildings of the medical school to another, or while milling around the information booth or standing in line to buy a fan, a much-wanted souvenir, or a cup of coffee.

After a while, preoccupation with physical comfort got the upper hand. We talked of ways to avoid the long treks on asphalt in over 100-degree temperatures under the beating sun and tended to settle for a "cool" room rather than a "hot" topic: one single lecture hall had air-conditioning. And how

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to obtain a taxi to reach a restaurant during the two-hour lunch break or at night – in this outlying area – became a major task.

According to rumors, the meetings originally were to have been held in the Congress Center in the middle of town. In fact, we had our opening session in this beautiful and air-conditioned building – constructed to receive dignitaries and to hold conferences. And we were greeted by King Juan Carlos and Queen Sophia. The organizers were proud to have gotten them to inaugurate the Congress, and I was amused to note that so many participants who soon would be denouncing "imperialism" were pleased to be greeted by royalty and to be served drinks and hors d'oeuvres by elegantly-clad waiters – who unobtrusively officiated around the marble-clad halls.

Unfortunately, in order to save money the organizers changed their original plans to have all the meetings there. On what, we all wondered, did they spend the $230 registration fee? Apparently, they assumed that sociologists mean what they say and thus prefer to mix with the masses rather than be comfortable. At the university, however, they did not mix with any of the Spaniards other than sociologists: Madrileños, I was told, flee the heat of July and August. Moreover, there was no simultaneous translation. I was told that the organizers had decided to dispense with it because it would have cost $500,000 and doubled the conference budget. Yet it was the Spanish contingent who objected to the use of English as the *lingua franca* as part of an American imperialist plot. Since I know French and Italian, I managed to follow the Spanish presentations. But the inability to communicate undercut to a large extent the major aim of this, and every other, international gathering – to make foreign contacts.

I also was frustrated, along with the ninety-five percent of ISA members who had no idea of what was going on. Only after the fact did I read in the daily bulletin that the Council, made up of representatives of national sociological associations, elects officials with one vote per country – which in turn elects the Executive Committee. Most of the membership, though in touch with one or more research committees, does not know by whom they are represented. America, England and India each have two of the sixteen persons on the Executive Committee. Through the grapevine I heard that one of our people, Neil Smelser, was running for President, but that "as an American" he did not have a chance. In the bulletin he was described as "tending toward ethnocentrism and inclined toward functionalism," while the Spanish and Indian candidates were praised respectively as "internationally known," and "from an important Third World country." Under the circumstances it was surprising that Smelser became Vice-President. Professor T. K. Oommen from New Delhi was elected. "Yes," he said in the post-election interview, "I did expect to be elected, but I did not expect such an overwhelming majority, and I must thank the sociological community for having placed their confidence in me."

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The anti-first world ethos of the Association should not be surprising, given the fact that participants from everywhere tend to bask in liberal slogans, pay homage to internationalism in scientific contributions that decry the positivism which "reigned" in the 1950s and 1960s – blaming those American theorists who founded the ISA and supplied the intellectual bases for ongoing theoretical disagreements. This is not to say that American sociologists were altruistic, or that they furthered internationalism only in order to spread democratic ideas. After all, they acquired international reputations that stood them in good stead in their universitites and associations at home. In any event, over the past thirty years the ISA increasingly has been dominated by non-Western ideology, although other first world sociologists – from Sweden, West Germany or Italy – manage more or less to hold their own.

To some extent their image is secured by the fact that for them as well English is a foreign language. But the issue is more complicated, since Indians, for instance, also speak English better than any other language and would be as lost in Spanish as the majority of Americans. In fact, one Indian scholar explained that "we must come to terms with the fact that in these post-colonial times English has become the most popular language." To mollify the native protesters, he suggested that we ought to have resumes in Spanish. So far as I know, only Alain Touraine, who is at home in French, English and Spanish, gave his paper in all three languages – at which point some admired his skills and others were annoyed that he took too much time.

Professor Oommen skirted the issue by stating that in the future the organizing committee would meet between Congresses, and that he would set up a fund for third world participants and non-convertible currency countries. Even if he is successful, could this bridge the gaps separating national, personal and professional interests and ideologies? Arthur Meier, the East German Chairman of the Program Committee, thought that the theme of this congress, "Sociology for One World – Unity and Diversity," would encourage collaborative investigations of the new dynamics of "globalization" that transcend conventional boundaries and bring about "cosmopolitan understanding." But so far as I know, this was the aim when the ISA was founded. The large studies of industrialization and modernization that were so popular in the 1950s and 1960s, and which some now put forth as culprits responsible for "American domination" – however ill-conceived or naive – did expect to prove that ultimately our world would become one. Furthermore, as a West German participant whispered to me, whatever Parsons, Goode, and the other "functionalists" did wrong, Americans after the Second World War *did* help to institutionalize democracy in Germany and a few other countries.

Margaret Archer, the outgoing President, spoke of the fresh agenda required by the newly emerging international order, and of the need to "mobilize Humanity itself as one self-conscious agent." Sociologists addressed these problems from their various theoretical perspectives. Sessions were

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devoted to examining whether it is preferable to talk in "macro" or "micro" language, whether to generalize and move from small interactions to global ones or vice versa, whether "to bring man back in" at the end of the post- and anti-post-Parsonian era (of systems theory) and how to empirically conceptualize the relationship between time and space. To what extent are we able to formulate a theory that can link social innovation and change that will incorporate both personal and societal factors and do so for the most "advanced" and the most "backward"? It is the central problem for sociologists, one that is bound to be troublesome.

Else Øyen, Vice-president of the Research Council, wrote an excellent introduction to the book, *Comparative Methodology*, which she edited and which was distributed to all Congress participants. She pointed out that there are "eternal and unsolved problems inherent in sociological research," and that comparative studies will have to take into consideration both "the uniqueness of enclaves" as well as the "growing homogeneity and uniformity" of our world. She found that sociologists use four basic approaches to comparative research: some don't consider cross-national differences and focus on theoretical and methodological factors alone; others pursue their ideas and data across national boundaries without considering that their interpretations may be inapplicable; yet others consider all these problems but purposefully ignore them and make compromises in order to gain new insights; and many acknowledge the other points of view but argue that we must raise questions about comparative studies themselves. And she pointed out that comparative researchers use terms such as cross-country, cross-national, cross-societal, cross-cultural, cross-systemic, cross-institutional, among others, imprecisely, and that they confuse national boundaries with ethnic, cultural and social ones. But how do we translate a concept from one cultural context into another one without distorting it – and also account for the ongoing change of a concept within its culture?

Inevitably, these questions were not and could not be answered. In my own sessions with the research committee on the history of sociology we grappled with "lesser" issues, such as "The Nietzschean Roots in German Sociology," "Sociology, Ethics and the Present," and "The Sociology of Argument and Intercultural Negotiation." And in these smaller groups intellectual questions were discussed openly, although underlying political assumptions were dealt with only allusively. Most of the second world participants on the program did not show up, so that our discussions were among Americans, Germans, Italians, Spaniards, Scandinavians, two Russians, and a sprinkling of Poles and Indians. However, the overall intellectual content of many sessions was on a fairly low level. "Quality control" was lacking, and many of the participants presented papers they already had discussed elsewhere.

Given the revolutions of 1989, I had been looking forward to a meet-

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ing that would feature some of the people who had been engaged in these events. I had hoped that in addition to theorizing about them and thus "emasculating" the human achievements and analyzing notions of "agency" (individuals with intentions) and "humanity" (essence of large groups) – which are the "business" of sociological theory – some of the excitement might rub off. Instead, professionalism won out and the organizers decided that the occupation of sociology came first.

Too bad that the ISA has become too big to allow for flexibility. We had a unique opportunity to start reconceptualizing our paradigms, to make them more reflective of reality, and to try undercutting the taken-for-granted ideologies. As an "afterthought," on the afternoon of the last day, the organizers did schedule a session about "1989" – when nine participants drew seven listeners.

Too bad the Madrid Congress ended up not only as a circus but as the pursuit of the customary business of sociology. I wonder whether international meetings of other academic disciplines, such as political science, anthropology, economics, or history, are equally disappointing.

Coming in

Partisan Review

- Fiction by Amos Oz
- Julia Kristeva on the French Revolution
- Mario Vargas Llosa: *The Country to Come*
- Leszek Kolakowski: *The Decline of Historicism*
- Philippe Raynaud: *Feminism and the Ancien Régime*
- Pearl K. Bell on Elizabeth Bishop
- A. B. Yehoshua: *The Israeli Novel*
- Robert Alter on Vladimir Nabokov
- Shlomo Avineri: *Reflections on Eastern Europe*

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Karen Wilkin

AT THE GALLERIES

Years ago, New York proclaimed itself a "Summer Festival." These days, free concerts, outdoor sculpture shows, and Shakespeare in the Park notwithstanding, the sentiment is more likely to appear in the works of modish ironic artists than anywhere else, but there may be more truth in it than we suppose. The coincidence of half a dozen first-rate exhibitions made this past summer one of the most rewarding in a long time. This constellation of exciting, stimulating shows was all the more remarkable because summer is traditionally the art world's slow season. (I am suppressing the thought that what I consider absolutely outstanding may be what current curators and museum directors consider good enough for the slow season.)

From mid-May through September, we were treated to surveys of early Vuillard and late Hartley, to what seemed like half the Matisses in Soviet collections (and other notable delights) in "Matisse in Morocco" and "Poussin to Matisse: The Russian Taste in French Painting," and to retrospectives of Prendergast and Hofmann. Because there were heady weeks when all or most of these overlapped, it was possible to make enlightening comparisons and check the usual wisdom against the reality of the work.

The arrival of "The Intimate Interiors of Edouard Vuillard" at the Brooklyn Museum (May 18th to July 30th) signalled the beginning of this wonderful season. Organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Houston, the show was also seen at the Phillips Collection, Washington, D. C. (where it was less sympathetically installed than in Brooklyn). The show is the first to concentrate on the years between about 1890 and 1900, when Vuillard painted some of his best and most characteristic scenes of *petit bourgeois* domesticity. These pictures are the works of a young man – Vuillard was born in 1868 – but one who was already an original, albeit modest, painter, very much of his time yet with a nicely independent mind. The show consisted mainly of small-scale pictures, often views of the apartment where Vuillard lived with his mother and sister, until her marriage to one of his artist friends, along with the occasional glimpse out the window. As the decade progressed, he ventured into other apartments, painting them and their inhabitants, such as his friends, Misia and Thadée Natanson, the publishers of the avant-garde *La Revue Blanche*. (Misia Natanson is supposed to have been Proust's model for Mme. Verdurin, which gives the less than successful decorative panels Vuillard executed for her apartment an interest they might not otherwise have.) The real subject of the exhibition was, in a sense, the relentless decoratedness of domestic French interiors at the turn of the century. In Vuillard's world, figured wallpapers all but devour the inhabitants of rooms; windows

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are heavily draped, light enters only in defined shafts, and pattern subsumes structure.

Color is what makes Vuillard's best pictures so telling and sets the young painter apart from the older artists he admired. The introductory section of the show, a group of family portraits and self-portraits dating from about 1888 to 1891, made it clear that he was well aware of Renoir, that he experimented with a Signac-type divisionism, that he was briefly interested in Van Gogh and Toulouse-Lautrec, but that, ultimately, he was neither Impressionist nor Post-Impressionist. Vuillard's smouldering, somber color was his own from the start. Later on, the banked fires of his palette cooled off and silvery grays and nameless neutrals dominate, but the result is no less personal: a pink edge cuts through an otherwise uniformly gray and cream picture, salmon underpainting escapes from superimposed khakis, a patch of celestial blue crops up where you least expect it. I kept thinking about Georges Braque's paintings – after about 1918 – with their similarly dense textures, insistence on noncolors, lights and brights wrenched out of darkened surroundings. Even the complexity of Braque's large-scale studio and salon interiors seemed somehow related. Is the likeness a reflection of their common Frenchness, their common artisanal background, a certain overlap of experience (although Braque was fourteen years younger), or was there direct influence?

Vuillard's sense of touch seems to come from the Impressionists, but he soon found a way of building up expanses of crusty, dry paint that is shared by only a few of his friends and contemporaries, notably Bonnard. It's simply a question of making oil paint "leaner" by drying the pigment on cardboard before using it, but the effect is distinctive. Combined with Vuillard's individual sense of color, it gives his pictures a textile-like density and unity.

Vuillard is at his best, as a rule, at small scale, when a single touch of a brush lays down a plane, or a few stabs pattern a wall. He never seems to scale up his mark when he scales up his pictures, so that laborious filling-in replaces the unifying rhythms of smaller works and, as a result, the larger paintings often seem niggling or just plain overwrought. He is best, too, when he concentrates on the peripheral, the half-glimpsed. He is a master of the fleeting – the way figures move in and out of a room, the way a patterned dress is swallowed visually by a complex setting, the way a backlit figure can become just another papery shape in a riot of wallpaper, fabric, and carpet. He can turn his own subject matter inside out, making us aware how the same figure, in the same setting, can snap free of its surroundings because of a variation in light or color or pattern. Vuillard may have painted the same places over and over again, but he celebrated the unexpected moments when a familiar room is changed by being seen from the corner of one's eye, from an unexpected viewpoint, when a shift of light makes the thoroughly known momentarily fresh and unknown.

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In Brooklyn, the show was supplemented by an exhibition of prints by Vuillard and his contemporaries from the museum's superb graphics collection. As was clear from the few prints within "The Intimate Interiors" (and from the fine little Vuillard show at the Katonah Museum last summer), he was a splendid printmaker. Lithography allowed him to explore a transparency of color new to him and to create surfaces with a new kind of looseness and airiness. The lithographs, composed of color shapes that reveal themselves as tangles of line, breathe in ways that the paintings rarely do. They seem transitory, fragile, not only because of the ephemeral "nonevents" they record but because they threaten to unravel at any moment.

Some of the pleasure of "The Intimate Interiors" was marred by the pretentious pseudopsychology of the text panels. I'm not sure what disturbs the curator most: all that pattern in such small pictures strikes her as an equivalent for tension; circumscribed subject matter equals claustrophobia; and dense paint stifles. A typical panel stated the thesis and grudgingly acknowledged the arbitrariness of the reading: "In many paintings of his family, Vuillard used images of confrontation, embarrassment and alienation. Little is known about the everyday life of Vuillard's family, however, and it is impossible to say whether his paintings reflect real tensions in the household." As usual, the talk of "confrontation, embarrassment and alienation" tells you more about the writer than the artist, but the result is to trivialize the paintings, to literalize what may have been purely formal, expressive inventions and turn them into illustrations. (Viewers seemed to go for it; I kept hearing things like, "Is that his mother? She looks very in control.")

One painting, the Museum of Modern Art's endlessly fascinating double portrait of Vuillard's mother and sister, painted about 1893, might support these conjectures. The massive dark figure of the seated mother is projected toward us by the oddly tipped chiffonier behind her, while the sister bends forward, as though trying to fit into the canvas, apparently extricating herself by main force from the wallpaper pattern behind her. It is a disturbing, provocative picture, one of Vuillard's best, but it is worth noting, given the curator's text, that in the context of the show, it was unique. Is the curious relationship of the figures to each other and their setting really evidence of emotional stress, or is it an imitation of the audacious crops and unlikely viewpoints of the Japanese prints that Vuillard admired?

Anyone bent on psychological interpretation would have found less equivocal material in the intense images of "Marsden Hartley: The Late Figure Paintings," at Salander-O'Reilly Galleries in June. Hartley painted figures only in the five or so years preceding his death in 1943. The best known of these are probably the "imaginary portraits" of his heros, Albert Pinkham Ryder and Abraham Lincoln, and the tributes to a family of fishermen with whom Hartley lodged during a couple of extended stays in the small community of Blue Rocks, Nova Scotia. (There's also the uncanny

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"portrait" of John Donne in his coffin, at the Brooklyn Museum.) Hartley was most preoccupied by the portraits of the family. He deeply admired them all, but one of the strapping sons seems to have fully reciprocated Hartley's affection – a rare thing for the painter. When the boy, his brother, and a cousin were drowned in a storm, Hartley was devastated. The "archaic portraits," as he called them, were painted several years later, as memorials, dredged out of the depths of feeling and memory. Salander-O'Reilly's exhibition included several of these, along with both versions of the well-known *Fisherman's Last Supper* – idealized images of the family at dinner with the dead boys restored to their habitual places – here happily hung side by side.

Seeing these relatively familiar works with many less familiar figure paintings, some crude and tentative, others powerful and deeply moving, was a treat. The few paintings of magnificent young men that the frail Hartley, in his sixties and ailing, permitted himself made it clear that he passionately admired robustness and health. His young hunters and fishermen all but burst out of their mackinaws with sheer vitality and brawn. His bathers on the beach and his naked athletes – represented in the show by one of the erotically charged "Madawaska – Acadian Light-Heavy" series – are Hartley at his most explicit and, sometimes, sunniest. (The beach pictures coincidentally make clear Milton Avery's debt to Hartley.)

Through it all, we recognize Hartley's typical habits of composition: the frontality and jammed-up space that persists whether he is painting cocktail glasses in the late teens, Bavarian alps in the early thirties, or ideal fantasy figures at the end of his life. The loaded pigment is a constant, as well, as is the sense of lights and brights having been dragged, with effort, up to the surface. Hartley's personality, rather than that of his imaginary sitters, dominates, so that we feel as though we are seeing a room full of self-portraits, images of what Hartley wished to be and what he cared about most deeply. It may be significant that the marvelous portrait of Ryder, all bushy eyebrows and beard, portrayed in the woolen cap and sweater of contemporary descriptions, seems to have the most specific character. Did Hartley, as fellow painter, identify most with this image? The drab color, the introspective expression, the slightly withdrawn pose make Ryder's legendary shyness palpable. The portrait is the antithesis of the sturdy *Arizona Prospector*, painted a year later in 1940, which presents us with a vigorous, elegant man glowing with health and energy, his hair and moustache silver against his ruddy skin, his blue eyes frank and candid.

The show also included a generous selection of Hartley's all-too-rarely seen drawings of fishermen and bathers, uneven in quality, but all deeply felt. In reproduction, these sketches can look schematic or slight. Many of them have far more presence, more material subtlety and conviction in actuality, and seeing them with the paintings that derived from them emphasized Hartley's gift for making things simpler and more monumental than life.

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Either the Metropolitan Museum's "From Poussin to Matisse: the Russian Taste in French Painting" or the Museum of Modern Art's "Matisse in Morocco" (May 20th to July 29th and June 20th to September 4th, respectively) would have been cause enough for rejoicing; the combination was exhilarating. Each show offered abundant rewards on its own, but each reinforced the other. About half the paintings in "Matisse in Morocco" are in Russian collections, so collectively they enlarged the Metropolitan's exhibit, and since that included Matisses that both prefigured what he did in Morocco and reflected the impact of the trip, seeing the two shows together was especially illuminating.

Matisse spent not quite seven months in Morocco in 1912 and '13, returning to France for several months in the middle. He had been to North Africa once before – briefly to Algeria – but it was his first extended stay, and contrary to his usual practice while travelling, he went specifically to paint. Many of the Moroccan pictures are large and ambitious. Some were made to fulfil commissions from Morosov and Shchukin, the Russian collectors who were, at the time, Matisse's chief supporters. The show reunited all but two of the Moroccan paintings and a generous selection of drawings, some newly exhibited. (One of the missing pictures is too fragile to leave the Soviet Union, while the other is in the Barnes Collection, which never lends anything.) It's the first time these pictures have been together since Matisse's 1913 exhibition at Bernheim-Jeune.

The show is a joint Soviet-American venture, happy evidence of *glasnost*. First seen at the National Gallery in Washington, it will travel to Moscow and Leningrad. The New York installation was far more successful than the Washington version, where a kind of mania for grouping, presumably inspired by a single documented triptych, took over; in New York, individual paintings were allowed to speak for themselves.

Matisse's spare ink drawings record his discovery of Tangier, once the weather permitted him to leave his hotel room. Minarets, the domed tombs of holy men, the gates to the old city all preoccupied him, as did the randomness of the city itself. In his drawings, Matisse translated the brilliant light and blue-tinged whitewash of Tangier into vast expanses of white paper; in his paintings, he invented other equivalents: luminous colors that evoke without describing, applied as carefully built-up layers or as translucent washes, with equal effect. Matisse's patrons had requested "landscapes," and he struggled to fulfil the order, but the Moroccan countryside, even transformed by the North African spring, failed to interest him. He preferred nature domesticated or distanced, brought into the hotel room as vases of flowers and baskets of fruit, or seen through the window. Nature disciplined, as three remarkable paintings of the gardens of the Villa Brooks attest, was acceptable. They range from a dense, layered evocation of twilight to a rapidly executed, explosive image of midday light, distillations of the lush foliage and

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bare, sandy earth of the North African garden into shapes and colors that have little to do with the actual but seem powerfully accurate.

The figure paintings came a little later. At first, Matisse had difficulty persuading models to pose, not surprisingly, in a culture that isolates women and celebrates an iconoclastic religion, but eventually he succeeded. His drawings record what appear to be formal sittings as well as figures observed in the city – men in cafés, *sifsari*-wrapped women in the streets. His canvases are perhaps as much portraits of costume as they are of individuals, but they are all the more arresting because of it; the brilliant color and rich embroidery of traditional Moroccan dress provoked marvelous improvisations of hue and drawing.

Matisse went to Morocco not, as many of his predecessors did, to search for the exotic, but to see firsthand the living culture that produced the tilework, ceramics, textiles, and other objects that had attracted him for years. Even more important, Morocco promised brilliant and steady light. The artifacts of North Africa make little appearance in the paintings done in Tangier; they would surface later on, as props in the theatrical version of the Orient Matisse created in his studio. In Morocco, he concentrated on the limpid, seaside light of the region. The celebrated "Moroccan Triptych," a large portrait of his favorite Moroccan model, Zorah, flanked by a view out the window of his hotel room and an urban landscape of the Casbah gate, is really a celebration of the perception of light.

In the center, Zorah sits on a terrace, flanked by her slippers and a bowl of goldfish (another recurring "Arab" motif). Her patterned robe dissolves into the glowing pale blue-green of the wall behind her, an expanse that fills the picture and excludes any more distant view. Yet the sensation of being out of doors, of radiance, is overwhelming. Layers of warmer color surface unexpectedly from underneath the blue-green, adding to the sense of being dazzled, knocked off balance. On one side, the view of the gate abstracts the violent contrasts of light and shadow of North Africa, turning the sensation of moving from enclosure to exposure into a vast plane of hot pink. Brilliant blues, a legacy of both the Fauvist habit of using chromatic opposites and the region's ubiquitous blue door and window frames, intensify the arched pink shape. By contrast, the view out the window, on the opposite side, seems relatively tame, an indoor picture. The English church and the Casbah, a row of trees, become large patches of creamy white, dull ochre, and, of course, enveloping blue. The brilliantly lit terrace seems all the more intense because of the shifting light of the paintings on either side.

Matisse's "orientality," as it has been called, his love of composing with multiple patterns, his ability to reduce his entire world to the language of the carpet, predated his trip to Morocco and lasted long after his return. Earlier he had travelled to Moorish Spain, as a kind of preview of his Moroccan trip, and had painted a series of still lifes that play complex perceptual games with

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textiles, wallpaper, carpets, and bunches of flowers. One of these marvelous Seville still lifes and a close relative were included in "The Russian Taste in French Painting." Surprisingly, they "out-oriental" anything Matisse did in Tangier. In one painting, space is as congested as a Vuillard interior; a sofa and table, both covered with boldly patterned cloths, jam the canvas, while a "real" geranium joins the fugue of twice-removed and depicted floral images. Indescribable, lush color knits it all together. A slightly earlier version of the theme is even more extreme, virtually all overscaled blue-on-blue pattern, with ambiguous space suggested only by the aggressive modelling of a few objects that sit uneasily against the exuberant ground. Pictures such as these make plain how much Matisse simplified and clarified his taste for the arabesque, once he got to Morocco. (To reinforce this, there is the Museum of Modern Art's *Les Marocains*, an image of Morocco filtered through memory, painted two years later, and among Matisse's most abstract works.)

If the still lifes at the Met bore witness to the long gestation of Matisse's orientality, other works made clear the importance of the Moroccan trip. Two canvases of 1912, probably done when Matisse returned from his first sojourn in Tangier, make the point. *Nasturtiums and "Dance"* and *Corner of the Artist's Studio* are astounding pictures, images of nothing made endlessly absorbing and expressive: a deck chair, half out of the picture, a screen, a drape, a vase of flowers on a sculpture stand, a bunch of leaves that melt into the background. "Matisse in Morocco" made the genesis of these paintings clear. The palette of blues, pinks, and oranges is the Moroccan palette, while the dense layering of color, too, recalls the facture of certain Moroccan pictures. And so on.

The Matisse room, the last in "The Russian Taste," grouped the celebrated 1913 portrait of Mme. Matisse, several of the early, post-Fauvist paintings of agile pink nudes in stylized green settings, assorted fine still lifes, and, perhaps the star of this section, with its later pendants, the 1909 masterpiece, *Conversation*. Of its expanse of radiant blue and its figures, in striped pajamas and elegant dressing gowns, on either side of a window open on a stylized garden, a bachelor friend of mine said wistfully, "That's a painting of how life ought to be lived." This marvelous selection may have been the only possible finale to a show that included some superb Cézannes, at least one fine Bonnard (and several others), an atypically strong Gauguin, and an Henri Rousseau of great charm in which, contrary to the title, a white horse appeared to be eating a leopard-skin rug – not to mention the old master portion of the show, cumulatively less impressive, but with some outstanding inclusions.

The Poussins in this section were in many ways its highpoint. Two early canvases of battle scenes, done about a year after Poussin's arrival in Rome in 1624, were reunited for the first time since they were divided, post-Revolution, between Moscow and Leningrad. The general oddness of

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the space in these paintings probably owes something to their having been based on compressed, illusionistic Roman reliefs, but the combined effect of this flattened space, along with the geometry of paired figures, heroic pose answering heroic pose across the general chaos, and the subdued, earth-toned palette, was like a kind of proto-Cubism. (Braque is supposed to have copied Poussin, when he first came to Paris, but which?)

A slightly later scene from Tasso's epic poem, *Gerusalemma Liberata*, painted in 1630 or '31, was almost as elusive as the battle scenes, although ostensibly more rational. The slim, agitated figures, the horses turned in and out of the shallow space, the moody sunset lighting, all helped to subvert the clear geometry of Poussin's composition. The disjunctive color, which, as usual, refused to take its place spatially but set up its own rhythms, added to the strangeness and poignancy of the picture. By contrast, a late religious image of 1655, which rounded off the selection, seemed pat and predictable, an overt homage to Raphael and little else.

An interesting undercurrent of commentary on the history of Russian collection ran through the show. Before the French Revolution, for example, wealthy Russians were avid for the sentimental genre paintings that their French counterparts prized, but in the years that followed, unlike the French, they were completely uninterested in pictures of Republic virtue, a fact not altogether surprising but which led to some odd inclusions. David's 1809 exercise in camp, *Sappho, Phaon and Cupid*, is one of the silliest pictures ever painted. (The Russian who commissioned it – not an advocate of democracy, hence the "literary" theme – apparently had a lot to say about what was painted, which should serve as a stern warning.) A forceful Ingres portrait of a Russian nobleman almost made up for the David, but then there was that lifesize Gérard of the Empress Josephine on the porch of Malmaison, like something out of *Architectural Digest*.

It is difficult, of course, to judge the accuracy of the impression we received of Russian collectors' taste. Were Boucher, Fragonard, and Watteau unpopular, unavailable, or was only one of each permitted to travel? The modernist portion of the show offered more clear-cut evidence by comparing Morosov and Shchukin's acquisitions of works by the same artists – landscapes and seated figures by Cézanne, for example, and the Matisses. It was clear that while both were buying adventurously, Shchukin was consistently more daring, more willing to acquire challenging works rather than ingratiating ones. All in all, the show simply whetted one's appetite to see the collections from which the selections were made.

The Whitney's summer offerings included retrospectives of Maurice Prendergast and Hans Hofmann, from June through the beginning of September. Both were long overdue. There must have been *something* between the large travelling Prendergast show organized by the Museum of Fine Arts, Boston, in 1960 and this one, but the last major Hofmann exhibi-

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tion in any museum was held in 1977 and seen only in Washington and Houston. Don't let two good shows devoted to important, underrated American modernists fool you into thinking that the Whitney has backed away from trend; the Prendergast show was organized by the Williams College Museum of Art, and the Hofmann show was the work of a guest curator, not a Whitney staff member.

It was an odd juxtaposition. Although Prendergast was a committed modernist and far more adventurous than the Ashcan School "Eight" with whom he exhibited, his sparkling paintings, good as they are, seemed almost timid in comparison to Hofmann's muscular abstraction. It wasn't a question of figuration versus nonfiguration, but rather of nineteenth- versus twentieth-century attitudes. Prendergast's career neatly straddles the turn of the century – he began serious studies in the mid-1880s and died in 1924 – but his delicious pictures seem to belong to the past. Hofmann, a generation younger and extremely long-lived – he died in 1966 just short of his eighty-sixth birthday – was a notorious late bloomer whose work seems remarkably current. But Prendergast is a difficult painter to classify. It's easy to think of him as one of the many turn-of-the-century translators of French innovations into local idioms, as one of the ubiquitous Post-Impressionists who helped give vitality to the art of America, Canada, Great Britain, and many other places in those days, but he is far more inventive and eccentric than most.

Once the Boston-based Prendergast made his first trip to Europe, in 1886 or '87, he returned many times for extended periods. He picked up all sorts of modernist notions along the way and gradually developed his own approach – a homemade, gentle Fauvism charged with some of the fantasy that runs through American painting. His watercolors are energetic dapples of color shapes and spots; his canvases, carpet-like "mosaics" of textured color patches. Monotype, as the show made evident, suited him particularly. He could make the necessary wipes and smears of the medium into expressive gestures. His palette is unpredictable, whatever the medium, ranging from the jewel-like brilliance of his watercolors, to the murky pastels of the monotypes, to the somber, slightly chalky hues of his late canvases.

Prendergast's subject matter was set early on: women (mostly) and children at leisure, in settings that at first seem fairly naturalistic but turn as we look into idyllic, if crowded, enchanted forests – Arden with picnickers and donkey rides. Even in early days, when he was more faithful to observed reality, he went for the same combination of the multiple and the delightful. His beaches and parks are full of bathers and people promenading in perpetual sunshine. The monuments of Venice are obscured by crowds surging through the Piazza San Marco or over the Rialto bridge; rain simply provides decorative puddles and reflections and brings out a host of multicolored umbrellas. Prendergast's world is an unbuttoned, updated, slightly fantastic Sunday afternoon on the island of La Grande Jatte, American-style.

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His lively young women are like Seurat's figures with their corsets unlaced or a frieze of Puvis de Chavannes's nymphs let loose on a New England beach.

Prendergast's place in the history of American modernism is usually defined by his being part of "The Eight," although he didn't share their dark naturalism. More important, he was one of the organizers of the 1913 Armory Show, a member of both the American and international selection committees. But as the Whitney show made plain, Prendergast can hold his own simply because of the excellence, the charm, and the conviction of his paintings. He really is that much-vaunted phenomenon, an American original.

If Prendergast has sometimes been overlooked, Hans Hofmann has been actively resisted. In this country, he has had his champions, but his reputation rests largely on his teaching. He is supposed to have brought the message of the European vanguard to a generation of American students, most of whom, we are frequently told, became professionals and many of whom became well known. The one thing everyone knows about Hofmann is his "push-pull" dictum, his shorthand for an idea about activating a painting through oppositions of color, shape, touch, and placement. In his native Germany, Hofmann is pretty well ignored, treated as an American painter, even though he didn't come to the United States until he was fifty. Curiously, Hofmann is revered by British painters. He seems to be one of the few Americans they take seriously – but they think of him, as the Germans don't, as a European.

The usual explanation is that the wide range of Hofmann's ways of painting confused his public and made it difficult for people to see how good he was. Since he was eager to pursue all possible implications of what he discovered by painting, his work conspicuously lacked a "signature" image, at a time when this was believed necessary to serious art; hence he was underrated. The Whitney's show gave the lie to that theory. More than anything else, Hofmann emerged as a powerful, unmistakable individual.

The odd shape of Hofmann's career was both apparent and, to an extent, irrelevant. Although the show was the first "full" retrospective of his career, this means less than we might think. When Hofmann came to the United States to teach in 1930, he left behind most of the work he had done during his years of study, teaching and participating in the European vanguard movement. Only a few drawings, watercolors, and the occasional canvas survived, so it is difficult to get any sense of Hofmann's evolution as a young artist. Then, too, Hofmann taught fulltime in this country until 1958, when he closed his school. Only then could he devote himself entirely to painting. (He was able to do so because of the enthusiasm and the efforts of his dealer, Sam Kootz.) The best-known and many of the best of Hofmann's paintings date from the last ten years of his life when, in an amazing burst of energy, he produced painting after large-scale painting that made visible his

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lifetime's probing of what art could be.

Even the earlier works, loosely-painted landscapes and a wonderful series of still lifes, free-wheeling works on paper and drawings that carried the burden of his energy when he had little time to paint, make Hofmann's individuality manifest. He had a heavy hand, for the most part. Paint goes down in generous dollops over large expanses (except when he thins it out to transparent washes or delicate squiggles). Color is always brilliant, saturated, and, usually, abrasive. Hofmann is better when he doesn't include the full spectrum in a single painting, but even when he limits his color, he insists on outrageous chromatic oppositions – gritty orange and acid green, or magenta and lemon yellow; when he gets away with it, it's superb. When he doesn't, the pictures still often have an edgy power (Hofmann's slightly sour color and thickly-loaded surfaces seem notably unlike Matisse, despite his well-documented admiration for the French painter. There's something aggressively uningratiating and rather Germanic about Hofmann's color, which the proximity of the various Matisses in New York, at the time of the retrospective, helped to underline.)

Hofmann emerges, too, as a wildly uneven painter, but a great one when he hits. His pictures can suffer because of his well-known fondness for polarities – of color, of edge, of shape, of surface – which he often tried to fully encompass in a single painting. Sometimes, he simply overcooked or overembellished a picture, adding too many little opposing strokes, too many small incidents and refinements. But when he gets it right, the result is stunning. The raw materials of painting become intensely compelling. Blocks and strokes of heated color become the protagonists of tense dramas. Hofmann, at his best, pries his color planes apart, pulls some towards us, banishes others to the back; in one superb canvas, a smooth yellow block, placed dead center, holds a near-chaotic smudge of reds and greens at bay and implies a whole universe of space between them, while in another, a densely brushed "cloud" of near-black strokes tears itself free of its rosy surroundings and spatters the canvas with odd grays and gray-greens. It's theatrical, it's self-conscious, and it's wonderful.

Reading the dates on these pictures is astonishing. The octogenarian Hofmann exudes energy, vigor, appetite for discovery. They are youthful pictures made by an old pro. It's a combination that today's young painters still can learn from, just as many of their teachers did from Hofmann himself.

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GOING TO THE MOVIES

Morris Dickstein

WAR!

In one of those odd ironies of film distribution, just as peace was breaking out across half the globe last fall, a number of extraordinary war movies were released. Each of them would have been an unlikely project just a few years ago; each involved the recreation of a painful, even grisly subject in strikingly contemporary terms. They exemplified how the treatment of war has become more frank and daring, more graphic and demanding, especially as the movies have come to reflect our still-troubled conscience about America's role in Vietnam.

Only one of these films, Oliver Stone's *Born on the Fourth of July* – adapted from an angry memoir by a crippled veteran, Ron Kovic – actually dealt with Vietnam, yet none of them would have been made as they were without our post-Vietnam immersion in the dark, brutal, bitter side of war. They exposed audiences to a level of pain and violence unthinkable in earlier war movies, and they bring us face to face with the terrible losses and individual sacrifices that are the unwanted fruit of all serious combat. Though influenced by the *Catch-22* spirit of the Vietnam era, none of them – with the partial exception of Stone's movie – insists that all war is absurd, a mere sham. They allow for patriotism, even for political necessity, but confront us unforgettably with the high personal cost of victory as well as defeat.

Significantly, not one of these movies deals directly with World War Two, the prototype not only of the just war but, as a 1940s film subject, of the clean war, before Hollywood ever conceived of the blood-curdling realism of battle that could be achieved by special effects, lighting, and expensive location shooting. Instead the movies of that period aimed at a more official realism available only in cooperation with our armed services, which, as the price for their enormous technical assistance, approved all scripts in advance and blatantly insisted on being shown in a favorable light.

In a sense, then, these were official productions, made with a government seal of approval at a time when few filmmakers would have dreamed of being critical of the American military. From the forties to the sixties – from *The Story of G.I. Joe*, *Back to Bataan*, *The Sands of Iwo Jima*, and *Battleground* to *The Great Escape* and *The Dirty Dozen* – the World War Two movie is essentially the action movie, but also an effusive tribute to the American soldier and the American way of life. Only a few of these films acknowledge the real harshness of war – Tay Garnett's gloomy, atmo-

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spheric *Bataan* (1942), for example, a story of defeat, made when the outcome of the war still hung in the balance.

Even when the overt patriotism is muted, these movies are hymns to discipline and collective effort. They show us war almost as a civilizing process: subduing a vicious, unprincipled, almost subhuman enemy, defending a cause worth dying for, and welding an unruly, cacophonous, disparate group of men into a unified fighting force. Just as the great European films like *Grand Illusion* focus on class differences, or national differences, to be surmounted by the ultimate recognition of a common humanity, American movies – in line with such novels as *The Naked and the Dead* – reflected the regional, ethnic, and religious conflicts of a more plural, more fragmented society.

The GIs in most World War Two movies were seeing the world – and seeing other kinds of Americans – for the first time, but they were also learning to subdue their differences towards some larger social goal (working together, achieving some kind of justice, winning the war, defending our ideals) that was never seriously to be questioned. These were parables of Americanism, of acculturation. Hence, war movies attracted not only the super-patriotic John Waynes but also the sentimental Hollywood liberals for whom the Army was a microcosm of American society, a force for assimilation and mutual tolerance, besides serving as our bulwark against fascism.

The first half hour of *Born on the Fourth of July*, beginning with the title, is a crude caricature of this traditional ethic of personal sacrifice and national crusade. With an exceptional heavy-handedness, Stone tries to give us the dreamy essence of small-town Americana, from the exhortations of John Kennedy, who brings the message of the World War Two generation to the early, hopeful years of the sixties, to the naive religious patriotism of Ron Kovic's parents, blue-collar ethnics who were especially receptive to Kennedy's call to sacrifice. The young Kovic gets the same message from boyhood war games, from Fourth of July parades, from his bloodthirsty wrestling coach, and from ramrod Marine recruiters, as if middle America in the postwar years, beneath its innocent surface, were simply a powder keg of macho violence waiting to be ignited. (This is also conveyed by the brutal elisions of Stone's technique, with its choking close-ups and wild camera angles.)

Ron Kovic is yet another vehicle for Oliver Stone's overheated autobiography, his obsession with the problems of a young man growing up in America. In the name of a higher cause Kovic buys into the sickening male fantasy, a power trip, a distorted ideal of manhood, even choosing to make war not love by skipping his high school prom. This foreshadows the way the war later robs him of his potency, until the antiwar movement restores him to a full sense of his own humanity.

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If this sounds pat and programmatic, it's because it is programmatic. Stone is a preachy but intensely visceral filmmaker, going for the gut in every scene, underlining the obvious, hammering his points home. *Born on the Fourth of July* is painful to sit through, but Stone's films reach us even as they work out his own recurrent fixations. *Born on the Fourth of July* really begins not in the stylized hometown sequences or the brief but equally mannered battle scenes, which take us over the same ground as every other Vietnam movie: the tense, jangling atmosphere of an alien terrain, the enormous firepower, the guilt over civilian casualties, the pervasive fear and loss of purpose. The movie takes off after Kovic is injured, flown back to base camp, even given the last rites in a sea of writhing, shrieking bodies, before the overtaxed doctors have time to operate. This movie is less about Vietnam than about one man's maimed, shattered, almost helpless body, and Tom Cruise, a coldly intense actor, plays it that way, from the outside, as the story of Kovic's anger at a world that has casually deprived him of his body. (For a more subtle, varied, ironically inflected performance, compare Daniel Day-Lewis's impersonation of an angry crippled man and a lover in *My Left Foot.*)

Cruise's portrayal works as a *physical* performance more than as a parable of the loss of ideals: it's Tom Cruise of *Top Gun* trapped in a cripple's body, robbed of his athletic grace, robbed of the sex he had barely begun to use. This skews the film towards the personal horror. As David Denby commented, "A boy's loss of potency is put on the same level as a nation's loss of honor." Stone's close-ups create a claustrophobic intimacy: they measure the shrinkage of Kovic's world and imprison us in his outlook as he is imprisoned by his injury. Stone and Cruise are remarkably faithful to Kovic's raw, grating personality and to the strident simplicity of his gripping memoir. No war film has ever given us this kind of howling lament of sexual loss and physical debility, or shown us these nightmarish details of convalescence in V.A. hospitals, where men lie in their own shit and vomit while well-fed rats nibble along the floor. Pictures like *The Best Years of Our Lives*, *The Men*, and *Coming Home*, which I wrote about in these pages over a decade ago ("Bringing It All Back Home," *PR* 4, 1978), were made, courageously, in more inhibited times, when the gross physical details were off limits. Perhaps as a result, they focus more effectively on the psychological dimensions of injury and recovery.

The subjective, claustral world of *Born on the Fourth* has its distinct limits, marked out by Stone's obsessions with masochistic humiliation (as in *Midnight Express*), martyrdom (as in *Talk Radio*), and conversion experiences (as in *Salvador*, *Platoon*, and *Wall Street*). Never more than in *Born on the Fourth*, Stone is an over-intense, autobiographical filmmaker, who projects himself emotionally onto every one of his subjects. He typically sets up his young protagonists between two fathers, or two causes, and makes us a party to their cataclysmic shift of loyalities. These heroes are usually cal-

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low innocents (like Charlie Sheen in *Platoon* and *Wall Street*) who learn the rotten ways of the world, or obnoxious troublemakers (like James Woods in *Salvador*) who somehow find a cause they can believe in. These are really the same story though the personalities differ; Ron Kovic is both of these characters, first the innocent, then the troublemaker, and, as always, Stone heaps a political parable onto a growing-up fable.

Yet it's surprising how much of the Vietnam era Stone works into his movie. The external trappings of the sixties and seventies, such as the anti-war demonstrations, were so crudely stereotyped by television images that they're almost never convincing on film. Stone gets it right, not just the look but the mental atmosphere. Once again, as in *Salvador*, Stone's adrenalin, his emotional extremity, pitches him in the right direction: With the help of Abbie Hoffman in a poignant, funny cameo appearance, this is a chillingly accurate reconstruction of scenes few of us would care to live through again. Yet there are other moments which are starkly surreal, such as the battle of the paraplegics in the Mexican desert, with Willem Dafoe as a ferociously bombed-out vet who stands for what Cruise might yet become. This is a scene out of a Beckett play, or out of the demented climax of Stroheim's *Greed*, or the early pages of Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, where the shell-shocked vets gather at the "Golden Day."

Unexpectedly, Stone feels obliged to give us a bit of uplift at the end as Kovic, with his book already published, prepares to address the 1976 Democratic convention, thus ironically fulfilling John Kennedy's call to greatness and his mother's early dreams of fame. Kovic has finally found a cause – and among the antiwar vets, a community – that makes him whole again. This brings *Born on the Fourth of July* closer to the redemptive message of other recent war movies. Edward Zwick's *Glory*, a film about a black Massachusetts Civil War regiment, turns what could have been a downbeat story – all the main characters are killed – into a heroic tale in the World War Two mold. The battle scenes are as gory as any other post-Vietnam movie; perhaps more grippingly so, because the soldiers line up at close quarters in what seems like a suicidal way of making war. The filmmakers tried to be painstakingly truthful about how everything looked and how the war was actually fought; historian James M. McPherson, writing in *The New Republic* (January 8 and15, 1990), described the portrayal of the doomed attack on Fort Wagner as "the most realistic combat footage in any Civil War movie I have seen." Yet the script falls back on the World War Two model as an unexpected (and surprisingly optimistic) way of dealing with race in America.

The brave exploits of the 54th were much celebrated at the time by men like Emerson, Henry Ward Beecher, and James Russell Lowell. They opened the door for 100,000 more black soldiers to fight for the Union, and – even in the first newspaper reports, before the literary men weighed in – they may have significantly altered the way blacks in America were seen by

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whites. (One of the reporters who would tell the story is there in the movie, as a symbolic conduit to a larger world.) There are two stories here, the bare bones of a relatively minor incident in the military history of the Civil War, and the more important matter of how it was reconstituted into myth – a process reenacted by the movie. With its mixture of factual history and invented characters, the movie is deliberately restoring a forgotten legend, passing it through the prism of American patriotism and, more important, of all that's happened since then between blacks and whites, especially during the civil rights era. This is a modern fable in impeccably detailed Civil War dress.

The regiment lost nearly half its six hundred men, but what interests the filmmakers is how they were turned into a fighting force and earned "manhood" and respect – by dying. There's a pathos here, a deeper horror, that the movie doesn't fully exploit. Colonel Shaw, a young white officer from the world of Boston abolitionism, must battle every step of the way to take these brave, untried, ill-assorted men to their deaths. Coldly and uncertainly, he sloughs off personal relationships to mold them into a unit; he raises hell with the Union army to get uniforms for them, to get desperately needed shoes, to get them taken seriously; he fights for equal pay with white soldiers and blackmails senior officers to get them sent into battle; finally he volunteers his men for an impossibly heroic, suicidal mission, descends from his horse to lead them on foot, and in the end, after some fierce fighting, is dumped with them into a mass grave. (History recalls that when the Army, during a truce, requested the return of his body, a Confederate officer replied contemptuously, "We have buried him with his niggers." This too became part of the legend, especially when Shaw's father insisted on leaving the corpse where it lay, in the anonymous pit. As Robert Lowell put it memorably in "For the Union Dead": "Shaw's father wanted no monument / except the ditch, / where his son's body was thrown / and lost with his 'niggers.' ")

These attitudes towards blacks were not confined to the rebels. The movie reminds us of the racism and condescension in the Union Army itself. The black troops are often mocked by white soldiers and officers and brutalized by their Irish drill sergeant, another traditional movie touch. We are meant to understand that this is for their own good, not just as fighters but as human beings. The first half of *Glory* is a basic-training movie with scenes out of many World War Two and Vietnam films (such as Stanley Kubrick's brutal *Full-Metal Jacket*). It shows us how a rag-tail group of men becomes a unified, disciplined outfit. But applied to the 54th, this standard theme carries a special racial charge. The usual platoon in a World War Two movie is an ethnic alphabet soup from which blacks were strangely absent, since ours was still a segregated army. In *Glory* the sterotypes are all black: the simple fieldhand, the black intellectual, the angry young buck, and the wise old retainer, steady and self-controlled, who's been in battle before. The

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movie shows them overcoming who they are, winning honor and respect with their fighting and with their death.

Except for the last of these men, played with dignity and restraint by Morgan Freeman, none of them takes readily to army life. In the abrasive Trip, powerfully played by Denzel Washington, we have a rebellious figure out of the 1960s rather than the 1860s. Trip's story is a tendentious racial allegory of black anger giving way to integration and patriotism. This is summarized in the final image of Trip and Shaw together, almost embracing, thrown together into the common grave. Having at first refused to carry the regimental colors, Trip finally carries them to his death in the last charge. This is a perfect specimen of liberal filmmaking, focusing bravely on race (a nearly forgotten theme in the 1980s) yet urging us all to rise above it, to find common cause.

Thus the movie reverses the pattern of *Born on the Fourth of July*: there the mindless patriot learns to become a troublemaker, to focus on his anger, to see through everything; here the troublemaker, disciplined by training and combat, lectured by Morgan Freeman on *white* sacrifices, is softened by belonging to a family, a community, and finally becomes a patriot. For Oliver Stone, war is a sphere of urgent moral choice but its aftermath is a form of living death; Ron Kovic can ease his tortured soul only by confession, by angry protest and grim self-abasement. For the makers of *Glory*, death in war is a form of salvation, the stuff of legend, the kind of legend that makes things happen. It's not a great movie, but, as Pauline Kael put it, a good movie on a great subject. Thanks to its impassioned treatment of this unique moment in black and American history, the movie breathes life into heroic World War Two themes that Vietnam films and books tried to explode.

Kenneth Branagh's new film version of *Henry V* comes down halfway between those two extremes. Based on Shakespeare's most heroic play, depicting one of England's most celebrated military triumphs, the story – unlike, for example, the absurdist *King Lear* unveiled by Jan Kott and Peter Brook – would seem an unlikely candidate for a post-Vietnam treatment. Wrong! Branagh, a young actor who both directs and stars, goes head to head with Olivier's famous film, a semi-official production made towards the end of World War Two with the clear purpose of boosting England's sorely-tested morale. The result is astonishing. After Branagh's darker treatment, Olivier's film – which I loved so much thirty years ago – becomes almost unwatchable, at least on the sadly reduced scale of a videocassette.

Olivier's film was not a war movie at all but a banishment of war; it sees the world of 1415, the year of Agincourt, as a piece of medieval pageantry, a colorfully ritualized dream of combat and conquest. As Olivier tells us in his book *On Acting*, he took the look and decor of the film from the gorgeous illuminated plates of the Limbourg brothers. Since England was

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now allied with suffering France, the French court in the Olivier film is anything but the "enemy": it's a harmless, comic-opera realm of fairy-tale absurdity. After the French surrender, the court becomes the perfect setting for Henry's bluff but delicate wooing in two languages.

The battle scenes in Olivier's film are a glorious but bloodless spectacle. They displace the center of the play from Henry's troubled ruminations on the responsibilities of kingship as he wanders among his men on the eve of the battle, where he expresses the qualms that link him to Shakespeare's next hero, Hamlet. Olivier delivers these speeches movingly, but simply cuts other scenes that give the play a harsher edge, such as the confrontation with the three traitors in Southampton and the execution of Bardolph, one of Prince Hal's antic playmates from the Falstaff world in which he sowed his wild oats. By including and heightening such scenes, Branagh not only darkens the play but conveys what Olivier's static, timeless, highly visual conception neglects, Henry's growth, his transformation.

The untried Henry of Branagh's opening scenes is not yet the commanding Henry of the siege of Harfleur. There's still much of Prince Hal in the baby-fat of his fleshy face. The French Dauphin, with his gift of tennis balls, can mock him as a young wastrel for his "wilder days." In short, part of him still belongs plausibly to the Falstaff world; he's not a plaster god but a human being, a man who could easily be underestimated. Ultimately, this will lend credibility to the heroic side of the play. Henry's harsh justice towards his own men foreshadows the savagery of combat, and gives heft to his transition from the errant prince to the warrior king.

Branagh is able to have it both ways. The bloody carnage, the Beckett-like landscape after battle, the utter exhaustion of Henry and his men after a victory they can barely savor: this is grim-faced war as we know it today, the kind of victory for which men pay a fearsome price. Yet Branagh also puts great timbre and resonance, as well as stirring evidence of personal growth, into Henry's heroic speeches, such as his vaunting ultimatum at Harfleur and his great St. Crispin's Day speech. Some of this effect is lost in Olivier's more artificial setting, where the ramparts of Harfleur are like a stage-set for toy soldiers.

This is in line with Olivier's performance of *Henry V* as still essentially a *stage* play, which begins quite comically on a literal stage and proceeds among storybook castles in which Olivier is still basically the player king, the actor in greasepaint and costume. Thus the siege of Harfleur is performed as if it were a puppet-play, with little sense of menace or challenge. This is no art film like Branagh's, but broadly popular filmmaking, designed to ease a mass audience into alien literary language and a distant world. There's none of the sweaty, violent horror that Branagh hurls at us, with his modern post-Beckett sensibility. As a result, Branagh shapes a modern hero out of Shakespeare's least modern, most patriotic play – a hero with a past, a hero

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who grows up, who has an ache in his voice and dirt on his face. No wonder the playful wooing scenes that follow are so inferior to Olivier's. This modern Henry, like Oliver Stone's heroes, this is not a character who easily can shift gears and put the horrors of war behind him.

This brings to mind another impressive recent film that, like Stone's, isn't a war movie so much as an after-the-war movie, a terrible inventory of the human consequences of war. Paul Mazursky's fine *Enemies, A Love Story*, based on the novel by Isaac Bashevis Singer, is set in a meticulously reconstructed New York City of 1949, among the battered survivors of a conflict that has left them, like Ron Kovic, feeling more dead than alive. But where Kovic feels dead because he's lost his sex, can't feel his body, these people have only sex to simulate being alive. In this story of one man frantically bounding among three women, Singer and Mazursky adapt the material of bedroom farce and risqué ghetto comedy into a strikingly unusual exploration of the haunted mentality of the survivor. The hungry, groping passivity of Herman Broder and the operatic extravagance of the women who surround him are different versions of desperation, ways of living on when life has lost all meaning.

For these people, as for Stone's Kovic, the war will never end. The wounded, shell-shocked soldiers in Hemingway could make a separate peace, though they found no peace. But the people in *Enemies*, with their surface normality, their never-ending nightmares and hair-raising secrets, have gone beyond suffering into black farce. Deviousness and paranoia make perfect sense to them. Concealment is their strategy for survival. The flesh is their only reality. They live for the moment, but the past inhabits them corrosively and the moment by definition can never arrive. There's something even gay about them but it's the gaiety beyond tragedy that Yeats described in a late poem, "Lapis Lazuli," when he wrote, "Hamlet and Lear are gay; / Gaiety transfiguring all that dread."

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Mary Hivnor

THE BAROQUE EQUATION IN SPANISH FILMS

Until fairly recently, Spanish films were rarely exhibited in America. In the winter of 1988, however, the Museum of Modern Art presented a retrospective showing a wide variety of Spanish films, covering the years from 1940 to 1984. Some were included because of their historical interest, such as *Race* (*Raza*, 1941) based on a screenplay written by Francisco Franco, and *The Burnt City* (*La Ciutat Cremada*, 1976), anti-Franco and militantly pro-Catalan. *The Executioner* (*El Verdugo*, 1963) makes a plea against capital punishment that is both moving and comic. But the films with the greatest impact treated the experience of the postwar era.

An atmosphere of repression is to be expected in Spanish films of this era, not only as a result of censorship by a police state, but also because of the anguish and uncertainty that prevailed after the civil war, a period in which families were split down the middle and did not dare to speak out openly. Spanish directors of this period also were constrained by tight budgets. The cinematic result is a pervasive sense of watchful unease, of ideas expressed by indirection.

"Magic realism," a term used to describe both art and literature, may be appropriated to define this genre of film which gives nature (and natural objects) a significance beyond that which we usually accord them. What the camera sees is real, but the camera's timing and framing make that reality symbolic, haunting, even romantic. In *The Good Love* (*El buen amor*, 1963), the setting plays a part in the story, as the monastery and palace walls loom over the young boy and girl who have run away for a day to visit Toledo and the Escorial, fostering their sense of separation. *The Heart of the Forest* (*El corazon del bosque*, 1978) is about the attempts of a veteran to find and retrieve a guerrilla leader from the terrifying, labyrinthine woods where he has been hiding, locking him in mentally as well as physically.

Berta's Motives (*Los motivos de Berta*, 1985), directed by Jose Luis Guerin, apparently under the influence of Erice, is an extreme example of a technique in which the simplicity of certain sequences can be both elegant and evocative. At the showing which I attended, the audience was restless after the first hour of watching the activities of Berta and her brother against the sensational background of Segovia's landscape. Midway through the film, the male object of Berta's fantasies shoots himself (leaving the audience more surprised than Berta). Berta continues her fantasies for almost another hour of the film, so that after the uneventful ending, the theater reverberated with murmurs of rage. Yet the film is impressive and expertly defined. Certain

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scenes were extraordinary enough in their own right to make up for any absence of rational plot. In one silent sequence, the younger brother practices soccer with a tin can, at the edge of the farmhouse, rather far off, bobbing in and out of the scene, while in the lower right foreground, close up, a frog slowly crawls across the corner of the cinematic frame, dragging a string of bottle caps tied to its leg, and providing a "basso continuo" to the boy's bobbing in and out and roundabout. Whether this vignette represents the persistent vitality of a new generation (the boy), or the burden of the war years on the Spanish psyche (the frog), or even if it means nothing, this sequence is an elegant example of camera technique.

Many of these films curiously revive something of the baroque philosophy and concerns of the Spanish theater of the seventeenth century: the contrast between man's human and animal nature (*hombre y fiera*), country and city (*aldea y corte*), the natural and the artificial. The polarization is suggested by *The Heart of the Forest*, in which the guerrilla fighter, who at first is shown dancing courteously with the village ladies, young and old, is ultimately reduced to living like an animal in the woods, finally becoming so wild that his brother-in-law is forced to shoot him. The city-country conflict is described by *Tasio*; while other men have accepted better-paid work in the city, Tasio is left to survive by poaching, but he tells his daughter he will never go to "that place," and make money the way "they" do. The nature/artifice polarization is thematized in *Berta's Motives*, when mechanical technology invades the farm on every level. The final implication is that Berta herself will inevitably become artificial, as she crosses the threshold of puberty.

Recently, several films directed by Pedro Almodóvar have appeared in New York. They seem to be a deliberate attempt to overturn the artistic aims and assumptions of the postwar cinematic precedent exhibited at the MOMA retrospective. Almodóvar's approach is almost slapstick, and his scenic background is the city. No wide sweeps of landscape here, but traffic, crowds, rock music, and people making money. He seems influenced by the complicated plots of television and by his background training in pornography.

Spanish pornography may need some explanation. One of the films shown at MOMA, *Death of a Cyclist* (*Muerta de un ciclista*, 1955), includes a student uprising in a story about the sins of an egotistical professor. An example of his egotism: he reads the newspaper even as a young woman develops a difficult mathematical equation on the blackboard. The student riot which follows, and the academic fate of the young mathematician, are somewhat fudged over, but it is surprising that this whole sequence was not censored when the film was made in 1955. By 1974, some reforms in the educational system had been effected, and a general increase of freedom was eagerly anticipated as the country prepared for the replacement of the Franco regime. I was in Barcelona then and asked some students to what

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particular freedom they were most looking forward. To my astonishment, the inevitable answer was, "We're looking forward to getting pornography."

In Spain pornography has taken on special significance as a gesture of defiance against restrictions of the Church, the military, the bourgeois family. Such restrictions are confirmed by *The Good Love*, mentioned above, in which figures of authority and puritan inhibitions are portrayed as obstacles placed between a young couple. Later Spanish films have included much more than nudity. Perhaps it is just Spanish realism that has presented pornography for what it is: sadistic, violent, sometimes insane, and sometimes murderous. Yet these films did not go further to assert that pornography is depraved and inevitably degrading to women. In several of his films, Almodóvar does say this. His film *Matador* (1986) expresses a negative view of bullfighting, and the macho character of the national sport is identified with sexual violence, through explicit association. But if Almodóvar's intent was to attack pornography, the gruesomeness of the media undercuts his message.

In *Dark Habits* (*Entre tinieblas*, 1983), Almodóvar's approach is successfully comic. It is about eccentric and impoverished nuns who are interested in rescuing downtrodden prostitutes. The mood is of black comedy, but throughout the nonsense we get disturbing glimpses of the prostitutes' desperate lives. Almodóvar uses a garish style to develop some of the same kinds of baroque polarities mentioned above.

In two more of his films, *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* (*Que he hecho yo para merecer esto?*, 1984) and *Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown* (*Mujeres al borde de un ataque de nervios*, 1988), are variations of the same subject. Both take place in Madrid and make use of slapstick. (I would like to find a better word to convey the Spanish word "disparate," which is imprecisely translated as "absurdity" or "nonsense": it combines the connotation of a disrespectful overturning of convention with that of the shock of a bullet's discharge.) The two women of the films are from different social backgrounds, but both experience a series of confusions, exploitations, and mishaps; in short, "disparates."

In *What Have I Done to Deserve This?* the wife supplements her husband's income by doing cleaning in a karate studio. One evening she is lured into a shower, where she is brutally raped. Wet and miserable, she lets go with a few karate whacks, and then goes home and fixes supper for her overbearing husband, mother-in-law, and two sons. As the opening portends, she winds up knocking her husband dead with the karate stick. But before this climax we are offered, throughout the film, a multitude of picaresque episodes describing the ironies and incongruous conflicts in the lives of a poor urban family. For example, the younger, drug-addicted son is drilled by his hopeful grandmother in a rigid homework assignment: to divide a list of authors into antithetical categories: *romanticismo* or *realismo* – a baroque polarization which generally pervades the film. At the end, when the house-

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wife is left totally alone, and about to jump out the window, she sees the son returning and changes her mind. *Romanticismo* overcomes *realismo*, but with an ironic twist, as the boy explains, "I thought you needed a man in the house." The problem with this movie is that it contains far more complications than an audience can digest. The subplots and digressions, though sometimes amusing, are simply too confusing to hang together. The unity comes only from the theme of the impossibility of a woman's getting a fair deal (or even any peace of mind) in a macho world.

Women on the Verge of a Nervous Breakdown, made five years later, is neither realistic nor romantic but almost pop in its cinematic elation. It contains four or five female "clowns." The part Carmen Maura plays is that of an actress duped by a more established actor. The actor uses his voice to seduce women, leaving love messages on telephone answering machines. Somehow, the messages always get delivered too late. The cinematic action is in the crowded street, the apartment, film studio, or office. The color is so brilliant and artificial that it suggests a new laboratory technique: the dangerous red of a gazpacho, the dazzling blue of Maura's miniskirt suit, the silver glitter of earrings. Here man's misbehavior towards woman is mainly represented by the deceitful lying of the actor but also by the violence of some Shiite terrorists. On the other hand, feminism is also ridiculed. The film describes the modern tension in the "he and she of it." But in doing so, it also uses the classic baroque tension between *mentira* and *verdad*. The man is a liar, but the duplicitous profession of acting is shared by man and woman. And dubbing implies an extra falseness, as the actors superimpose their disembodied voices over the silently moving lips of the moving pictures of foreign actors (producing a Cervantes-like effect). Finally, on the most deafening level, the opening and conclusion of the film are overlapped on the soundtrack by a bellowed song about living an illusion and the falseness of the theatrical simulacrum.

Almodóvar's most recent production, *Tie Me Up! Tie Me Down!* (*¡Atame!*) revives another technique of the Spanish baroque: double-framing; here, a film within the film, or pornography within pornography. A young delinquent, just released from a mental institution, visits the studio where a porn movie is being filmed, kidnaps the star, and keeps her prisoner in her own apartment until she becomes "converted" to his ethos, his lifestyle, and to wanting him as a partner not only in sex but in life. The story (an unreal and sentimental version of the Patty Hearst case) contains the suggestion of the converter converted, since it presents the kidnapper as finally wanting to marry the girl, produce a family, and generally conform to the bourgeois norm. This, ironically, should make him acceptable to the Catholic Church (one possible interpretation of the opening shot of a large poster portraying an especially sappy-looking, pastel-colored Christ pasted on a wall). The film-within-the-film has a "Beauty and the Beast" aspect and provides a comic-

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strip subtext to the main plot: "This is nothing more than a love story!" says the producer. Perhaps that is also Almodóvar's own artistic intention, but I sadly think that the selling of "soft" porn to less hardened viewers is high on his "agenda." Almodóvar's distinguishing features are still evident: an assortment of ugly-fascinating women; garish colors; a technique which brilliantly breaks all the Hollywood rules. But the joyful atmosphere seems forced, and the ending (in spite of the usual upbeat concluding song) disappointingly flat.

I have said that Almodóvar's films take place in the city, in contrast to earlier Spanish films. The fact is that in his movies nature has gone by the board. The city is the reality, the country an illusion. Yet in *Dark Habits*, a tiger is kept prowling in the nun's yard; in *What Have I Done to Deserve This?*, a lizard runs frantically underfoot in the cramped apartment; in *Nervous Breakdown*, Peppa not only raises tropical plants but keeps chickens and rabbits on the terrace of her high-rise. These disoriented creatures are not just pets; they are emblems for their owners of a wilder, simpler life, where animals ran free. They represent the other side of the baroque equation: artifice/nature. Peppa tells her animals she would like to take them away and start over, "like Noah."

Of course, as *Berta's Motives* asserted, the natural world is perhaps finished in a sense – as is the kind of film which portrayed and used it so effectively: through a slow, dream-like pace; through lonely pastoral settings; through mysterious implications of transcendence. Evidently, Almodóvar has made a break with this genre. One can only go back and view the haunting old films retrospectively. Yet both the old and new show the persistence of a national preoccupation with fundamental ambivalences. Dwight Macdonald said that "cinema . . . is mute when it comes to expressing ideas." But he hadn't seen these Spanish movies.

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Michal Govrin

READINGS IN JERUSALEM

From February 18th to the 24th of this year, thirty-three poets from around the world came to Jerusalem, from the People's Republic of China, the Soviet Union, Hungary, Czechoslovakia. They were joined by thirty-one Israeli poets and by an autonomous delegation of Palestinian poets, the "West Bank." The first Jerusalem Poetry Festival was organized by Mishkenot Sha'ananim, Jerusalem's official guest house and cultural center. Many distinguished poets were invited: Edward Hana Sa'id, who was denied a permit to leave Egypt, and Breyten Breytenbach, who was granted a visa to enter South Africa, on the occasion of Nelson Mandela's liberation, cancelled at the last moment, but Ilhan Berk came from Turkey, Roberto Juarroz from Argentina, Vasko Popa from Yugoslavia, and Homero Aridjis from Mexico. English poetry was somewhat underrepresented: only Les Murray of Australia, Richard Murphy of Ireland, Charles Tomlinson of England, and Robert Creeley of the United States were there. Rita Dove from America was the only poet who cancelled for "political reasons"; Joseph Brodsky declined for personal reasons. Allen Ginsburg hesitated and consented too late to attend. Translators attached themselves to the poets, creating enclaves of languages.

At the opening reception, Harold Schimmel, who has exchanged his American English for a Hebrew all his own, clutches my arm: "What, you haven't met Michel Deguy yet?" (Both of us are fanatical readers of the magazine *Po&sie*, which Deguy edits.) The bustle, the international vagueness of any cocktail party, its theatrical supercharging of the ego, the milling of monads – each one fortified behind a plate and a glass of wine – did not portend well for communication or direct address. The same hopelessness as when routine shutters vision, until even the monumental sights of the city are covered with dust, the same dust comes back to me from Tomaz Salamun's poem, "Pity": ". . . for example dust / wherever it falls / down or to the side / or the existence of roots . . . " The crowds had not yet parted to reveal the tall figure and fiery glance of the Slovene poet whose words now, after the conclusion of the festival, continue to carve unknown faces in the landscape: ". . . you're the light of the world / no hiding place even in the mountains." (tr. Charles Simic).

Then the readings begin, in twenty-five languages. Voices leap into the center. The focus grows sharper, and with it the concentration, the listening. Arieh Sachs sculpts Hebrew with his whole body, three "Lines on the Tombstone of My Parents." Behind the windows, there are the tiny lights of distant slopes. The warm voice of Erez Biton, with a shade of Moroccan ac-

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cent, richly cloaks his blindness. His poem is an immigrant's palimpsest of the sounds and scents of North Africa and Israel. Bella Akhmadulina, emotional, says some words in English about her dream of being in Jerusalem having come true.

All of the following evenings in the Khan Theater, hundreds upon hundreds of poetry addicts fill the hall until one or two in the morning. They sit for hours in darkness, hanging on the reading voices, the words of translation dancing on the giant screen. And there is the whisper of listening, the joining of immigrants, the "exiles" from there, to their language. Yehuda Amichai, almost the poet of the people, greets both the guests and audience. He sketches the fear that passed over this same place, over the Sultan's Pool facing the illuminated city walls, the no-man's-land before 1967. In the face of Jerusalem, which is constantly changing, his poem, "An Arab Shepherd Is Searching for His Goat," becomes a mapping of the unconscious, the archaeology of fear which awakens suddenly in the dense quiet among the trees on Mount Zion:

> An Arab shepherd is searching for his goat on Mount Zion
> and on the opposite mountain I am searching
> for my little boy.
> An Arab shepherd and a Jewish father
> both in their temporary failure.
> Our voices meet
> above the Sultan's Pool in the valley between us.
> Neither of us wants
> the child or the goat to get caught in the wheels
> of the terrible *Had Gadya* machine.
> After we found them among the bushes
> and our voices came back inside us, laughing and crying
> Searching for a goat or a son
> has always been the beginning
> of a new religion in these mountains.
> (tr. Chana Bloch)

From another poem, "The Collection," Avot Yeshurun, the grand old man of Hebrew poetry, Tel Aviv rises – city of refugees camped on the sands of the Mediterranean, clutching their possessions, migratory birds between immigration and death. Tel Aviv is sung in a loud, bustling, nomadic, Jewish voice. It is a "Tel Aviv" evening. Meir Wieseltier reads from "The Burning of Holy Books": "At noon light rips / through the room, and we know what's what: / over the holy we'll put a transparent / greed." The troubadourism of Roni Somek, Pinchas Sadeh, the political involvement of Yitzhak Laor – what is Hebrew poetry, in the international context that has

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suddenly opened up – that of the Indian A. K. Ramanujan, Bei Dao from China, Salamun the Slovene?

After midnight, in Mishkenot, the hall is full. There is a reading of Hebrew poetry. I fear reading my latest poem, "Blood," written by the window of the maternity ward on Mount Scopus: ". . . How killing is the thick taste of blood, the heavy liquor stunned with milk, and the birth between us. . . " What is poetry? What is Hebrew poetry? What is this difficult-to-interpret poem called Jerusalem – "the most dreamed-of object," as (to paraphrase Walter Benjamin) Paris was for the surrealists?

On Monday, the voices from Europe, from what Claude Lanzmann calls *les non-lieux de la mémoire*, or in Sandor Csoori's Hungarian poem, "The Little Street": ". . . little street, little street, Europe's / Tiny poppy-seed street; death's footprint / Can you see in your black mud, / Despite your eyesight, weakening," are heard. Europe's poetry is haunted by the return of the repressed, of the dead buried by the regime's bulldozer or by forgetfulness. There are Agnes Gergeley of Hungary, Judith Herzberg of the Netherlands, and the horizon of Michel Deguy's philosophical poetry and the book he has just edited, *On the Subject of Lanzmann's Film, Shoah*.

A few days later I meet at his office Zwi Arad, "Tolka," the director of Yad Vashem and a survivor of the Vilna ghetto. When we last met he was a general and I a private in the army (another, Israeli, layer of relations). He seizes me enthusiastically, "Michal, you've got to see the canyon we're building." In the heat of the morning we drive in his car to the building site. On the way I tell him about the poetry festival and about Deguy's new book. The building site is a huge dug-out crater. On the gigantic walls, leading ditch by ditch through Europe, are carved thousands of names of cities, villages, and towns whose Jewish populations were exterminated. At the bottom of the path that descends between the walls of rock, I experience a moment's fear of entering, of being trapped; an incomprehensible refusal to search, like a tourist, for the name of my mother's city. Wet lime oozes beneath our feet. A fissure in the rocks begins west of Germany and leads to Brussels and France. Tolka urges the builders to hurry: what about the foundations for Czechoslovakia? (Vaclav Havel, during his visit to Israel the following month, is going to inaugurate it.) He points to a pit in the corner and declares, "Here's where I'm building Czechoslovakia." Which Czechoslovakia, in what geography, what time? Poets writing in Israel and Europe after Auschwitz share a common fate, a crisis of expression and language. It is echoed in the almost identical openings of poems by Holub from Czechoslovakia and by Mordechai Geldman from Israel.

On Monday afternoon, a panel discussion, "The Poet as Revolutionary," gives the opportunity for theoretical discussion. Holub, Csoori, and Salamun speak of the years of oppression in Central Europe, the nightmarish "Games" in the poem cycle of the Serb Vasko Popa. They speak without

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pathos about survival, the preservation of personal freedom, alienation from the Western left and from the naiveté of its dreams. They speak of economic pragmatism as the only way to assure freedom in their regions. They distinguish between the poet as a citizen who may commit revolutionary acts and the revolution of consciousness that is the arena of poetry. Thus arises the need to be in the most private, most minimal way, in the instant, to assassinate the present with a metaphor, to be in the territory of the dream. As Tomaz Salamun read from his poem, "Birds":

> I dreamed that blood flowed from his mouth.
> He lay on the sand and stared into the void.
> All around breathed the cliffs.
> With my shoes on, I stepped on him, crushing his
> nose. It seemed to me that the birds
> feared him. That they wouldn't claw him apart
> if the stream of blood was too thin. I broke
> his neck at its nape. I made slush
> of his ears and face. He squeaked,
> soaked with sand. The sky
> gave way and deepened. Birds began to
> gather in flocks and approach.
>
> (tr. by Michael Biggins)

At a supper for the participants that night I am meeting the poets whom I will shortly "moderate" to the audience. Gentle-looking Asad El Asad, President of the Palestinian Writers' Union of the West Bank and Gaza arrives late. He is a refined man about my age, born in Beit Mahsir, the village whose name reverberates with the sadness of Israeli laments for the fallen of the War of Independence. I invite him to join our table. Soon we shall be called upon to represent onstage the two sides of the controversy.

The audience is charged, alert. We already have been in Ireland, Sweden, Jerusalem, and Tel Aviv. Standing beside the poets, the actor Itzik Weingarten reads Hebrew translations. Then it is El Asad's turn. He approaches the lectern with me. The tension in the audience escalates. Something is happening here, onstage, unedited – Israeli recognition of autonomous Palestinian representation, Palestinian recognition in Jerusalem of an Israeli poetry festival. El Asad begins with a political declaration. His sentences are formulated along the rigid, standard ruler-lines of every such declaration. And afterwards, in protest, he reads a poem written by a friend in the camp for Intifada prisoners. I understand only the ascent of the poetic voice in a language I do not know. He reads his poem, "Continue Your Dream." Although only a small part of it is translated, even from the fragment it is possible to feel the pain. What is there to say? Thinking about the dream in Salamun's

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poem, I say, "No, there is nothing more personal than a dream – of the individual, of a people.

During the rest of the festival, people continue to hurry from hall to hall. Later that night the Russian poetry reading is packed full of cigarette smoke and bodies. The poets who have come from the Soviet Union under the new conditions of *glasnost* and those who live here – Akhmadulina, Yevgeni Rejn, Gennadi Aigi, Savelij Grinberg, Ephraim Bauch – stand and recite by heart. There are bursts of laughter, ripples of understanding, applause, sharp, alert faces. It feels like Leningrad, Moscow, perhaps the Yizre'el Valley in the 1920s of the pioneer generation, whose dreams were steeped in the Russian language they had brought with them from back there.

After the festival, I hear on my car radio that Warsaw has agreed to become a transit point for Jews on their way from the Soviet Union to Israel. The spokesman says that Poland has an obligation to save the Jews. No, the Poles are not afraid; they will not give in to threats from Arab terror organizations. It is a surrealistic encounter of two historic times, the Holocaust and the Intifada.

On Tuesday, the German poet Christoph Meckel reads. There is a deep vein of German in what was brought here so reverently as Culture. The books of Heine, Rilke, Trakl, Lakser-Schuler, Nelly Sachs, and the voice of Paul Celan on audiocassettes are passed from hand to hand like secret signs. Jerusalem through time looks like a crazy comic strip in which flags, conquerors, kings, messiahs, flash past in dizzying succession. Perhaps that is why the prophetic voice was always needed here (and is Meckel's German muse the proper angel for this?) in order to pierce through the whirl of history. The session ends with the voice of Paul Celan's last poems, written during his visit to Jerusalem and on the Mount of Olives.

Roberto Juarroz reads in Spanish from "Vertical Poetry":

> Words also fall to the ground,
> like birds suddely crazed
> by their own movements,
> like objects that suddenly lose their balance,
> like men who trip without there existing obstacles,
> like dolls alienated by their rigidity.
>
> (tr. John Chando)

Bei Dao, with the ancient tools of Chinese poetry, digs an airshaft through the grayness of Peking housing developments and the monumentality of Tienanmen Square with lines such as: "Love: Tranquility. / The wild geese have flown / over the virgin wasteland / the old tree has toppled with a crash / acrid salty rain drifts through the air. . . . Freedom: Torn scraps of paper / fluttering."

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After the festival, on the square in front of the Western Wall, behind the backs of the women who pray with pursed lips, pigeons flutter above scraps of bread. I return from my walk through the Dung Gate, by the road that climbs above the village of Silwan. The steeple of Dormition Abbey on Mount Zion is visible to the east. In an Arab courtyard, seen from the road above, are bird intestines on a tin tray. I see a lemon tree, a pink towel on a wire, hyssop on the ruined wall that holds a sink, a tourist bus groaning up the steep hill and disappearing at the turn of the road. The alert, penetrating staccato voice of the American poet Robert Creeley comes to mind:

> . . .
> in the late light, each
> edge of grass stalk
> a tenacious fact of being there,
> not words only, but only words,
> only these words, to say it.
> . . . no matter the imperfect
> useless gesture, all that is lost,
> or mistaken, the arrogance
> of trying to, the light comes again,
> comes here, after brief darkness is still here.

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David James Fisher

HOMAGE TO BETTELHEIM (1903-1990)

I came to know Bruno Bettelheim in the waning years of his life. Many things separated us; many things united us. If I did not and could not share his mother tongue, his classical education at the University of Vienna, his age, his unique historical experiences, the Holocaust, his emigration to the United States, and his singular work with severely disturbed children, I could and did share with him an antifascism, a commitment to lay analysis, a fascination with psychoanalytic hermeneutics, a concern for grasping contemporary history, and an interest in asking mordant questions.

There was a spirit of gravity about him, an intellectual seriousness and an emotional depth, most of which stemmed from the weight of his historical consciousness – above all his memory of German fascism and the concentration camps. I always found him to be courteous, formal in a European sense, a bit remote; yet there was always a compelling presence about him, a personal dignity, a sparkle in his eyes, an ironic sense of humor, an intolerance of the foolishness and stupidity of human beings, a capacity to be self-deprecating and self-critical. His toughness was legendary; he also directed the toughness toward himself, as evidenced by his remarkable work discipline and by the prolific quality and quantity of his publications.

He frequently made a gesture of touching, almost massaging his head, when he spoke; this was a man who clearly had a narcissistic investment in the mind, and when he could no longer generate fresh and original ideas, he no longer wished to live.

Bettelheim was depressed, often suicidally depressed. He spoke candidly, almost clinically, about his suicidal intentions. It became clear to me that he had researched, thought through, and convinced himself that this was the only courageous way out, the only dignified path for him at his stage in life. He knew that he had completed his creative and scholarly work. He had grown despondent after the illness and death of his wife in 1984, his companion for over forty-three years. He was terribly bitter and resigned about the rupture of his relations with his daughter, his hopes shattered after living with her in Santa Monica. A mild stroke had disabled him, so that writing and typing became major chores; it was sad to watch him labor over autographing copies of his books, which required a major expenditure of effort.

Bettelheim was a philosopher of psychoanalysis who spoke a fluent, ordinary language that was not condescending to his audience. That language resonated with a large, influential, international public because it touched people in their profoundest depths; he targeted his writings to appeal to the heart and intellect simultaneously. A finely trained European intellectual, he

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knew how to raise elusive questions about history, ethics, psychoanalysis, children and parents; he knew how to research, how to read texts, how to investigate and explicate psychological and emotional nuances, often grasping the meaning of things between the lines. He was determined not to get bogged down in highly technical or overly specialized questions, not to write in jargon. He developed a distinct style and a discernable voice in which he communicated with people on an emotional level, with much empathy.

He produced a distinguished and varied body of writings that demands a radical distinction between authentic feeling and cheap sentimentality, between rigorous analysis and reciting established pieties, between realistic confrontations with difficult choices and an objection to positions flowing from denial, avoidance, or reaction-formation. Most of his texts abound with a sincere humanity, compassion, and care, especially those devoted to comprehending the inner lives of the severely disturbed child; yet his works also have served to deromanticize and demystify. In short, his humanism was neither simple-minded, soft, overly optimistic, nor oblivious to reality.

For Bettelheim, the privilege of being a psychoanalyst and of practicing, teaching, transmitting, and modifying psycholanalytic theory and practice, consisted in a deeply ingrained respect for the human being, for his or her own privacy, individual uniqueness, struggles, quest for truth, aspirations towards personal forms of liberation, creativity, and playfulness. These values may reflect his identification with Freud and with the classical liberalism of the Viennese Jewish bourgeoisie of the interwar years. His is one of the last truly independent voices in the world of psychoanalysis, one of those irreverent iconoclasts who never cared about establishment institutions or psychoanalytic institutes, having considerable disdain for regional, national, or international psychoanalytic doctrinal quarrels. He regarded these quarrels as beside the point.

As a self-assured, critical voice, he spoke his mind – often in a combative, ascerbic, intolerant way, but always thoughtfully, succinctly, pungently. On certain issues it was futile to debate with him; he was often opinionated, rather harsh in his judgments – for instance on the politics of the antiwar movement in the 1960s, on the critique of American foreign policy, on the theoretical attempt to link Marxism with psychoanalysis. However, even in his decline, dialogue with him was possible; he could be astonishingly disarming, empathizing with problems he knew to be existentially and psychologically pressing.

Bettelheim was full of stories. In the right mood, he was ready to reminisce. For him psychoanalysis was not an impossible profession, it was a "spooky" profession, practiced by a gallery of rogues, geniuses, shamans, priests, false prophets, narcissists, exhibitionists, functionaries, and occasionally spooks. However, when all was said and done, he maintained a pride in psychoanalysis, finding it intriguing, impossible to pin down, and endlessly

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evocative. Bettelheim, himself, could be a little spooky.

He had fond and extremely favorable things to say about Wilhelm Reich, whom he knew in Vienna as a young man, regarding him as "the" seminal psychoanalytic thinker and clinician of the century. Whenever he spoke of him, he always noted Reich's vast vitality and unquenchable thirst for knowledge. Bettelheim identified with Reich because he, too, felt marginalized and ostracized by official psychoanalysis, at least in America. For him, Reich's *Character Analysis* (1933) represented the birth of modern psychoanalytic theory and practice. He had penetrating, if often biting, anecdotes about other luminaries in the psychoanalytic movement, including Margaret Mahler, Anna Freud, Heinz Hartmann, Kurt Eissler, D. W. Winnicott, Melanie Klein, Franz Alexander, and Heinz Kohut.

On my last visit with Bettelheim, I asked him for his clinical advice on persistent problems I was having with several patients who were children of Holocaust survivors. Bettelheim generously urged me to be patient, kind, sensitive, calm, to remain the master of my own anxieties, to learn to tolerate better the extended process of not knowing, to not rush into interpretations that reconstructed memories or fantasies of the Holocaust, to tough out the often ferocious negative transference (which he considered the most difficult task to learn and to assimilate in psychoanalytic technique), and to consider and to reflect on counter-transference as an authentic way to the mind and soul of the patient. Then he paused and said with a shock of painful recognition: "You know, *my* children are children of a Holocaust survivor." This is the Bettelheim I remember: helpful, incisive, caring, yet always personal, affectively attuned to the emotional and historical interplay of all interpersonal encounters.

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BOOKS

THE CULTURE OF CRITICISM

AMERICAN LITERARY CRITICISM FROM THE THIRTIES TO THE EIGHTIES. By Vincent B. Leitch. Columbia University Press. $45.00.

The recent history of modern American literary criticism by Vincent B. Leitch could pass for an encyclopedia. He seems to have read everything remotely connected with literary theory and criticism, and except for some omissions and a few slights, he has dug into every critical cranny from the New York Intellectuals and the New Critics to black feminist deconstruction. On the whole, Leitch sticks to the ideal of fair-mindedness and neutrality that the academic profession professes, though here and there he suggests or implies some approval or disapproval of an untenable or outlandish use of literature for ideological ends. In this respect, the book, for all its valuable research, is itself a product of the current academic tolerance of some of the self-interest and the extremism that has entrenched itself in the university. Such acceptance of a wide variety of conflicting ideas reminds one of Hegel's famous principle that whatever is, is right.

The early part of the story of American criticism is told in a fairly straightforward manner. But Leitch does not report the more complex views and the disagreements the historically-minded critics around *Partisan Review* had with the New Critics. For example, he does not make clear that we did not object only to the overemphasis on textual criticism, but that we felt the textual approach of the New Critics was arbitrary. For one thing, they were mostly single-issue critics of poetry and did badly when they ventured into prose, as did Blackmur in his writing on Dostoevsky. In addition, the New Critics were promoting a special poetic strain in their commitment to the style of Donne and to the antiromantic tradition – as well as in their theory of ambiguity which they stretched to fit certain poets. Nor does Leitch pay enough attention to the politics behind the New Criticism, as for example, expressed more directly by Allen Tate and by Cleanth Brooks in his study of Hemingway. On the whole, the treatment of this period both gains and suffers from the stance of not taking sides. Students, of course, will find his citing of the major figures of the New Critics and the New York Intellectuals useful – if only to recall some of their work. Leitch cites Lionel Trilling, Alfred Kazin, Richard Chase, Philip Rahv, Edmund Wilson, Harold Rosenberg, Clement Greenberg, Lionel Abel, Irving Howe, William Barrett, F. W. Dupee, Elizabeth Hardwick, Mary McCarthy, Delmore Schwartz, Isaac Rosenfeld, Diana Trilling, Steven Marcus, Norman Podhoretz, Susan Sontag,

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Sidney Hook, and myself, among the New York Intellectuals. But here again he could have expanded more on the distinctive thinking of many of these writers. Of the New Critics, there are citations from Allen Tate, John Crowe Ransom, Robert Penn Warren, Cleanth Brooks, René Wellek, R. P. Blackmur, and some of the lesser critics. But as in the case of the New York Intellectuals, there are no full intellectual portraits – though space considerations obviously prescribed some limits.

In between the early stages and the contemporary welter of theories and causes, Leitch covers such schools as hermeneutical criticism, phenomenological criticism, existentialist criticism, myth criticism, and the Chicago school. I suppose some academic ideal of thoroughness and fairness would dictate such full coverage. But it does lead to a kind of unfairness in giving equal time to approaches that now can be seen as less weighty in the scale of critical writing. In this respect, Leitch, himself, can be described as a scholarly rather than a thematic critic.

Yet I think most of the difficulties arise when Leitch comes to the contemporary scene with its profusion of deconstructionist, feminist, and black criticism, and something Leitch calls reader-response criticism. Here his execution is truly evenhanded and value-free. In dealing with deconstruction, he has lengthy expositions of Jacques Derrida, Paul de Man, J. Hillis Miller, Harold Bloom (who is really only a fellow-traveller), Geoffrey Hartmann, Jeffrey Mehlman (who has been shifting), and such younger Yale critics as Barbara Johnson and Shoshana Feldman. But he does not argue with the political meaning and assumptions of deconstruction. Nor does he question its proponents' apotheosis of an imaginary and fluctuating text against the real text. And he does not challenge their belief in the plurality of meanings. In general, their basic nihilism and undoing of the past also are not confronted.

In the earlier periods of literature, the lines are clearer and more contained within the boundaries of what has been thought to be critically acceptable. It is the contemporary situation that presents the most serious problems of discrimination and judgement. And it is here that we are most aware that Leitch, while giving a fairly accurate and lucid account of a discipline that has run wild, could have exercised most profitably his own critical appraisal and taste. As a result, all directions appear to be equally valid and interesting. For example, Leitch might have raised more doubts, in my opinion, about Edward Said's special blend of Marxism, deconstruction, and Arabism; or Frederic Jameson's amalgam of deconstruction and Marxism; or the dissolution of the text by de Man, Derrida, Miller; or the Lacanian version of psychoanalysis applied to the interplay of texts practiced by the newer Yale critics such as Johnson and Feldman. It is all simply part of the history of criticism.

When we come to the so-called reader-response, the feminist, the black estheticist, and the new left theories and uses of literature, one wishes that

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Leitch would have been more willing to take a position – which his own learning certainly qualifies him to do. Had he done so, Leitch might have considered the possibility that the emphasis on reader-response is another road to the anarchy of taste and the subjectivity of judgement, leading to the blurring of distinctions between literary works in terms of values and quality. I wish he had been more critical of the new left criticism, which, in my opinion, is largely warmed-over and academicized Marxism. I also think it has to be said that the black esthetic represents special political interests. As for the profusion of different and often contradictory feminist arguments, it should be pointed out that they have one thing in common: except for the more literary female critics, many of them take a sociological approach to literature; they assume that novels and poems are largely interesting or important as reflections of social currents, particularly in relation to gender. To be sure, these are questions rooted in traditional criticism. But the relation of traditional criticism to the newer criticism is itself a basic problem.

But there is even a more fundamental point to be made about the modern scene, taken as a whole: despite the various currents and eddies, it is all of a piece. Indeed, I think it can be said that this is the new counterculture, spreading from politics to philosophy, art, and literary criticism, psychology, education, ways of living. It has gotten a foothold in the academy and invaded the media. What was once a radical political movement has become a cultural movement. Professors have taken the place of workers. If one stands back and takes a longer, more historical look, one can see organic connections between the various strands of the new thinking. What binds certain literary theory, educational ideas, feminist criticism, deconstruction, and a good deal of left politics are the beliefs in a pervasive pluralism, a relativity of values, a rejection of tradition and intellectual authority, a skeptical view of Western civilization, and, above all, a profound dissatisfaction with the condition of contemporary life, particularly in America. At bottom, these beliefs are political in origin, and are tied in a vast and complex system of assumptions to much of contemporary politics.

Now, these intellectual tendencies, especially in their theoretical version, are evident mostly in the academy; the media dispense them in diluted, predigested form. Indeed, I don't think it has been recognized sufficiently that professors have institutionalized their interests. Most of the theories Leitch discusses have been merged with academic enterprises, involving careers, jobs, professional publication, and departmental organization. In fact, literary criticism unfortunately has been divided into academic theorizing and the kind of discursive, essayistic criticism, stressing taste and judgement, that is practiced by such writers as Alfred Kazin, Denis Donoghue, Lionel Abel, Irving Howe, Steven Marcus, Hilton Kramer, Morris Dickstein, Diana Trilling, Mary McCarthy, and Susan Sontag, whose work appears in publications for a more general, educated audience not steeped in semiotics and deconstruction.

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The fact is that most of the current literary theories do not relate to the actual writing of fiction and poetry; what they express are deep ideological concerns. Compare a statement, for example, by a writer such as Milan Kundera, that illustrates the working of the literary mind, with any of the abstruse, jargonized theoretical exercises these days that have usurped the place of literary criticism. In the Preface to *The Art of the Novel*, Kundera says succinctly of his own practice as a novelist and of his relation to the Western tradition of fiction:

> Need I stress that I intend no theoretical statement at all, and that the entire book is simply a practitioner's confession? Every novelist's work contains an implicit vision of the history of the novel, an idea of what the novel is; I have tried to express here the idea of the novel that is inherent in my own novels.

Kundera's statement of his literary credo is also pertinent to the current controversy over the curriculum, which involves the application of many of the new theories to education. In contrast to those who dismiss what they call the canon of Western thought and literature as an arbitrary and invidious selection of works, Kundera indicates, as T. S. Eliot also did, that the Western tradition exists in the mind and the bones of every serious writer. And it is to the destruction of this tradition that many of the new theories about art and literature are directed. Hence, the current crisis in criticism – for that is what it is – concerns more than a theory of literature: it involves our cultural identity.

These are some of the questions raised by Leitch's book. But the fact that they are raised does not lessen the value of his study, which is not only an exhaustive treatment of the history of modern American criticism, but also provides the basis for a knowledgeable discussion of the issues.

WILLIAM PHILLIPS

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THE PHILOSOPHER AND THE IMMIGRANT

LOVE IN THE PROMISED LAND: THE STORY OF ANZIA YEZIERSKA AND JOHN DEWEY. By Mary Dearborn. The Free Press. $22.95.
JOHN AND ANZIA: AN AMERICAN ROMANCE. By Norma Rosen. E. P. Dutton. $18.95.

It was a remarkable, unsuspected secret for over sixty years, and one of the unlikeliest of liaisons – a love affair between Anzia Yezierska, a strong-willed Jewish immigrant from Poland who yearned to be a writer, and John Dewey, the eminent exponent of common sense and eminently respectable professor of philosophy at Columbia University. She was thirty-something (birth records weren't kept in the *shtetl* where she was born), he was fifty-eight, and their involvement lasted for less than a year – from October of 1917 until the end of the following summer. That there was a romance is not in doubt, though whether their romantic attachment ever developed into a sexually fulfilled affair is not at all certain. But there is *no* doubt that some kind of desire was aflame in Dewey and Yezierska in that wartime year. Still amazing.

When they met, the slow-spoken Yankee philosopher had been married for many years and was the father of six children. Nothing in his public persona or his published work hinted at the passion and ardor he revealed in poems that invoked his "loins of fire" and the "thunder / Of my blood that surges / From my cold heart to my clear head." Though the language of his love lyrics is in the main mawkish, and even adolescent, what is interesting is that he felt compelled to write poetry in the first place (even Dewey's strongest admirers found his prose turgid and vague) to a woman some twenty years younger, a greenhorn in "pushcart clothes" who with characteristic flamboyance described a character obviously modelled on herself as "the ache of unvoiced dreams, the clamor of suppressed desires," and who regarded Dewey as "her father, her Pygmalion, her God." They were a very odd couple indeed, the dry pragmatist from Vermont and the overwrought and tempestuous redhead from the Lower East Side.

How did this astonishing revelation surface after so many years? The evidence lies in a cache of love poems that Dewey furtively wrote on scraps of paper in the months he knew Anzia Yezierska. He showed some of the poems to his beloved, and eventually tossed them all into the wastebasket of his Columbia office. And that might have been the end of it, had it not been

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for the assiduous housekeeping of a librarian at the University, who regularly salvaged Dewey's discards, smoothed out the crumpled bits of paper, and tucked them safely away in the Columbia archives. There they moldered for over half a century until the Dewey manuscript collection was given to the John Dewey Foundation, at Southern Illinois University, in 1970. When Jo Ann Boydston, a Dewey specialist, came upon the poems several years later, she set out to determine, by studying typewriter-key faces and paper watermarks, when they had been written – in 1917 and 1918 – and, even more intriguing, to whom. With the help of Lewis Feuer, another Dewey scholar, Boydston discovered that two of Dewey's love poems had been folded verbatim into two of Yezierska's fictional accounts of the affair, and the long-buried story began to emerge.

Two recent books – a work of cultural history by Mary Dearborn and a novel by Norma Rosen – attempt, in very different ways, to unravel the mystery of this strange romance. Each book begins with the fact that many years ago, or once upon a time, a famous philosopher and a penniless writer came together from opposite ends of American society. Most of what really happened is unknown or unclear. Mary Dearborn has pursued the truth as far as the available facts can take her, and then attempts to place the affair of John Dewey and Anzia Yezierska in a somewhat stilted context of American history – the uneasy and often tragic relations between immigrants and native-born Americans. In the course of her exhaustive research, she has also been able to pry loose the actuality of Yezierska's life from the incessant myths she kept writing and rewriting.

The novelist Norma Rosen, also fascinated by this curious romance, approaches it from a different perspective. Though most of the characters in *John and Anzia* are actual persons, what they do and say and feel in the novel is derived almost entirely, as Rosen says, "from traveling imagination's road." She asks: "What drew them together? What drove them apart? And what took place in between?" For Rosen, these are questions that "only fiction can answer."

Is it so? Mary McCarthy pointed out years ago that facts, information, even statistics are the bedrock of the novel. In recent years many novelists have woven real names and real people and true facts into the artifice of their fiction. When E. L. Doctorow brought Henry Ford and J. P. Morgan and Emma Goldman onstage in *Ragtime*, it impressed some critics as an ingenious stroke. Yet it was also lazy and tendentious; Doctorow's real people did not become characters in the story, but simple-minded ideological signposts. A writer can justify his use of historical persons in an invented story only by investing them with fictional reality as well; they must be dreamed into being and can't just be stuck onto a novel like raisins on a cake. Yet they must also be integral with actuality. In choosing to engage the real

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with the tools of fiction, Norma Rosen faced a daunting challenge.

What are the facts about Anzia Yezierska and John Dewey? She was born in a Polish shtetl around 1880 and emigrated to America with her large family in 1893. In the squalid tenements of the Lower East Side she experienced the grim disillusionment of poor Jews who had envisioned a "golden land" but found themselves at the end of the journey in a crowded and filthy ghetto. The bitter reality of America in which Anzia slaved for miserable pay in sweatshops became the substance of her early stories, gritty accounts, artless but poignant, of men and women reduced by poverty and brute labor to tatters of humanity, in constant fear of being "dispossessed" – the dread word for eviction when they couldn't pay the rent, their shabby belongings flung after them onto the street. (In my Brooklyn childhood I thought "dispossessed" was a Yiddish word; in that context, it was.)

This fiercely ambitious young woman, dishevelled but full of moxie, was determined to become something more than an exhausted tenement drudge bearing more children than she could feed. Before she was out of her teens she knew, too, that she had to escape the stifling tyranny of her father, a rabbi and Hebrew scholar who believed, as she wrote in the novel *Bread Givers*, "Women had no brains for the study of God's Torah, but they could be the servants of men . . . Only if they cooked for the men, washed for the men . . . only if they let the men study the Torah in peace, then, maybe, they could push themselves into Heaven with the men, to wait on them there."

Like so many young immigrants longing to become American, Anzia realized that education was the magical key to escape from the ghetto. She left home at eighteen, took courses at the Educational Alliance, and received a scholarship to Teachers College – in the Department of Domestic Science. Her diploma qualified her to teach cooking in the city schools, but of course the fine art of making cocoa couldn't satisfy her dream of becoming a writer. Nor could marriage and motherhood. Once she published her first story, impetuous Anzia threw caution to the winds and walked out on her stodgy husband and her young daughter. For this brazen act, her father called her "a daughter of Babylon."

Now that she was completely on her own, how would she live? Her salary as a substitute teacher of cooking was pitiful; she desperately wanted a permanent job teaching literature or history. When the school board turned her down for a better post, Anzia, never short on *chutzpah*, sought the help of the Dean of Teachers College, whose name was John Dewey. As Norma Rosen envisions that momentous encounter in an empty classroom: "Trembling, losing my breath, my mouth dry again, I push open a door. A man is stooping . . . I see that not all scholars are old and white-bearded like my father. The room wobbles dizzyingly. 'Professor Dewey – ' He is a slow-moving man, but he springs up nimbly as I sink toward the floor." She

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tumbles into his arms – and who will ever know what actually happened after that?

At the time – 1917 – John Dewey was probably the most famous intellectual in America. As Mary Dearborn writes, "He was not simply a philosopher. He was a teacher of philosophy, a psychologist, a social critic, a reformer, an educator." His book *Democracy and Education*, published the previous year, found a large audience beyond the world of professional educators, and his ideas about experimental education became enormously – and to some conservative minds destructively – influential. He wrote editorials and a column for *The New Republic*, and he was consulted by President Wilson on grave matters of state. But his personal life was less serene. Two of his sons had died in childhood, and after the second death Dewey's wife became increasingly bitter and withdrawn. He may have been more than ready for the handsome young woman with violet eyes who burst into his classroom in search of a savior.

We do know that the affair, or quasi-affair, was over by the autumn of 1918, when Dewey and his wife left for a three-year visit to the Orient. It's a fair guess that Yezierska never saw him again, but she remained obsessed with Dewey for the rest of her long life (she was about ninety when she died in 1970), and wrote thinly disguised accounts of their romance in novel after novel which repeatedly dwelled on the pain of his rejection. But her essential toughness and zeal to succeed as a writer were undiminished, and after her first book, a collection of stories called *Hungry Hearts*, was published, Anzia's life took a fantastic turn.

In 1920 Samuel Goldwyn offered her $10,000 for the film rights to her book – a fortune in those days – and brought her to Hollywood to work on the script while the studio flacks ground out a new persona for Anzia Yezierska as the "sweatshop Cinderella." In fact she had by then left Hester Street and the sweatshops far behind. She lived uptown and was making a fairly comfortable living as a teacher and writer. Though the glitter and glamor of Hollywood captivated her for a while, she found it hard to write in that tinsel world, and was soon back in New York, financially more secure than she had ever been. For some years her books were well received, and she became something of a literary celebrity; another movie, *Salome of the Tenements*, was bought for the movies.

And then, in 1929, her life caved in. She lost her savings in the stock-market crash, and her audience dried up. The reviewers complained, rightly, that she told the same story about the ghetto girl and her Gentile lover over and over, with a thick impasto of sentimentality and melodrama. Though she never stopped writing, she sank into oblivion for almost two decades, and reappeared only in 1950, when she published a fictionalized autobiography, *Red Ribbon on a White Horse*, which was the usual Yezierska mix of memory, experience, and wild invention. It adds little to what she had already

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written time and again about the crucial event of her life.

Did they or didn't they? The question is posed by both the historian and the novelist, and their answers are as different as fact and fiction. No one knows what really happened, but Mary Dearborn's conclusion must derive from the findings of her research. Norma Rosen, as a novelist, is free to follow the wide arc of the imagination.

What we know is that Dewey's love poems, though tender and ardent, are cautiously ambiguous about sex. In Yezierska's obsessive and frenzied recreations of the affair, a Dewey-like figure variously named John Morrow or John Manning or Henry Scott, who is all head ("My cursed analytical mind"), meets an immigrant girl named Fania or Hannah or Sonia, who is all heart ("You are fire and sunshine and desire"). But when sex comes into the picture, Fania's fire and desire fizzle like a Roman candle in the rain. When "Henry Scott," in the novel *All I Could Never Be*, makes his unmistakable move and cries "Love me!" the rabbi's daughter, not as liberated as she likes to think, is shocked and turns away. "Instead of a god, here was a man – too close, too earthly. She wanted from him vision – revelation – not this – not this." Taking Dewey to the Yiddish theater and introducing him to Yonah Schimmel's knishes was as sexy as Anzia was willing to get. Yezierska fancied herself an apostle of sexual freedom, "a passionate Russian Jewess – a flame, a longing," but the flame gave off no heat, and as Mary Dearborn dryly remarks, "she was never very good with the follow-through."

In Norma Rosen's novel the "loins of fire" are very hot indeed, and the lovers are in an ecstasy of sexual rapture that probably never came anywhere close to happening. As a novelist Rosen wants to be free to exploit actuality in order to heighten what she has imagined. Rosen nimbly accomplishes this by bringing one of John Dewey's closest friends into her story – Albert Barnes, the terrible-tempered inventor (of Argyrol) and passionate collector of Impressionist painting. Many of Dewey's friends were in fact dismayed by this friendship: how could the kind and generous "common-sense philosopher" be so devoted to the rude and vicious Barnes? For Sidney Hook, who was Dewey's prize student at Columbia, the philosopher's "fondness for Barnes was his most serious shortcoming . . . Every time Barnes got into a scrape as a result of browbeating, insulting, or cheating someone, he dragged Dewey into it."

As Norma Rosen conceives the figures in her real-and-unreal plot, it was Barnes's sinister bullying and aggressive power that fascinated Dewey as a counterpoint to his own decency and abstract intellectuality. In Rosen's view, Barnes was Dewey's "last hope of wickedness," and she skillfully evokes Barnes's savage opulence – "he looked like some powerful animal dressed up like a man" – as he casts his malign shadow on the lovers, and plots to destroy their stealthy idyll.

Most of Rosen's novel takes place in the summer of 1918 in Philadel-

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phia, where Dewey actually did direct a study, financed by Barnes, of the Polish-immigrant community in the city. Here again, Rosen adroitly selects actual facts that may suit her fictional purpose, and makes up the rest, and it all merges into a seamless imaginary whole. Some of Dewey's students were enlisted for the project, and Anzia Yezierska was in fact hired as an interpreter who would also investigate the conditions of family life and women. In Rosen's fictional version, the project is a sly ruse Dewey dreams up so that he can spend the summer with Anzia, who in the novel is frightened and repelled by Barnes, and dreads being within brutal reach of him in his Merion mansion, its walls crowded with paintings whose frames, to Anzia's immigrant eyes, jostle one another "like a Hester Street mob."

Rosen makes brilliant use of Barnes's light-drenched Renoirs and Pissarros, his tiny Degas of a dazzling orange-and-gold woman stepping from her bath: their colors and seductive shimmer become an erotic reflection of the lovers' lineaments of gratified desire. But the paintings are also emblems of the manipulative acquisitiveness and malevolence of the man who owns them. When Dewey falls ill in the Merion house, Barnes slyly alerts Mrs. Dewey to what has been going on. But it's clear that the affair Norma Rosen invented was doomed from the start. She does overstep the bounds of invention in rewriting Dewey's poetry for the novel, making it much more explicit than it was. To reinvent a man's sex life is one thing. To rewrite his poetry is sacrilege.

Just as no one can know what did take place between Dewey and Yezierska, we can only speculate about how and why it actually ended. Mary Dearborn, the feminist historian, feels that Dewey behaved with shabby cowardice toward the defenseless young immigrant he "seduced and betrayed," withdrawing without apology or explanation because he could not shed "his sense of obligation to his family and his public image." But what in the name of pragmatic reason was the poor man supposed to do? The image of Anzia Yezierska as a proper faculty wife pouring tea for the ladies of Morningside Heights is as inconceivable as the image of John Dewey living out the rest of his days in a love nest on Delancey Street. (And there would have been many, many days; he died in 1952 at the age of ninety-three.)

In Mary Dearborn's rather labored argument, the failure of John Dewey's "affair" with Anzia Yezierska represented a "very real failure on the part of native-born America in accepting immigrant America. In Yezierska, Dewey saw the possibility of knowing the immigrant through experiencing her . . . But in viewing her as an 'experience' he failed, finally, to come to terms with the flesh-and-blood person." But it is Dearborn who here fails to come to terms with flesh-and-blood, and succumbs instead to the dubious categories of pop sociology. The notion that Dewey's interest in Yezierska was only a calculated attempt to "experience the immigrant" is not borne out by the poems he wrote or by the sense of the man one gets from accounts of

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those who knew him. Anzia Yezierska was for John Dewey not just a box labelled "the immigrant" but a fervent and attractive woman, nor was she aroused by him only because he was born in America.

Norma Rosen knows that fiction has a core of truth even if it never happened. She sees her improbable lovers as individuals from different worlds who could not, because of character or background or obligation, resolve the problems raised by their affair. But more likely than not it was temperament that drove them apart. When the real Anzia Yezierska, long after the affair had ended, wrote a review of one of Dewey's books on education, she impeached him for lacking "the power to reach the masses of people who think with the heart rather than with the head." But was she thinking of "masses," or was she talking about herself? And what would John Dewey have said?

PEARL K. BELL

WOMEN AS PROLETARIANS

SOVIET WOMEN. WALKING THE TIGHTROPE.
By Francine Du Plessix Gray. Doubleday. $19.95.

Marx didn't have a whole lot to say about women. One passage from his essay, "Private Property and Communism," acquired a totemistic status among Marxist feminists. Marx argued rather murkily that the nature of a society's relationships between males and females demonstrates the "extent to which the human essence has become nature to man, or to which nature to him has become the human essence of man. From this relationship one can therefore judge man's whole level of development." That can take you as far as you want to go, mostly in all sorts of utopian directions along the lines of creating a social world in which human essences have become natural and sex differences are dissolved into some generic humanness.

Engels took up the challenge of women and, he claimed, stated what Marx himself would have said had he gotten around to saying it. His text, *The Origin of the Family, Private Property and the State*, became the rallying focus of subsequent Marxist feminisms. An apt subtitle for Engel's effort would have been, "Why Can't a Woman be More Like a Proletarian?" He decided she could be; indeed, already was, by drawing an analogy between reproduction and production and finding in the relations between the sexes the ur-class relation. In order to be truly liberated, women must first become

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real proletarians – wage slaves – and thus part of the universal class. Once the laws of history have worked themselves out, production for private profit ended, class antagonisms melted away, and reproductive functions taken over or subsumed by the sphere of production or society *in toto*, then, and only then pure sex-love will reign supreme. People actually believed this, but contemporary Soviet women are not among the gullible, as Francine Gray's fascinating new book reveals.

Whom one meets in the pages of *Soviet Women* are angry, exhausted men and women pretty much at the end of their tethers. Forget the new Soviet man; forget the new Soviet woman. What one finds – and anyone who has visited the Soviet Union can verify Gray's depictions with the evidence of her own eyes and ears – are human beings under terrific pressure from old habits and continuing traumas, state-induced. Gray hits the reader immediately with powerful images: to Western feminists the Soviet Union may be a patriarchy. To Russian women, it is a world in which women dominate *and* in which women suffer.

On the one hand, one encounters a culture in which men are incessantly put down, mocked and scorned by women. Teachers tend to favor girls "because their behavior is more closely modeled on the Soviet system of social values – on communitarian obedience, orderliness, altruism, dutifulness," according to one of Gray's respondents, Maria Osorina, a Leningrad psychologist and analyst of "The Powerful Woman Syndrome" in the Soviet Union. Even as Soviet men were killed off by the millions in World War Two and felt most powerfully the full force of the State's decrees against a public life and anything resembling an independent politics (it was overwhelmingly men who were convicted under the Soviet "parasitism" laws, that is, failure to work at a state-sanctioned job), women ruled over a domestic sphere to which they could retreat.

Soviet writer Tatyana Tolstaya has noted: "Home, hearth, household, children, birth, family ties, the close relationship of mothers, grandmothers, and daughters: the attention to all details, control over everything, power, at times extending to tyranny – all this is Russian woman, who both frightens and attracts, enchants and oppresses. To imagine that Russian women are subservient to men and that they must therefore struggle psychologically or otherwise to assert their individuality vis-à-vis men, is, at the very least, naive." Women, by contrast to men, ruled over their domestic kingdoms and "never suffered an equal sense of helplessness." According to Gray, "the overwhelming majority of even the most progressive Soviet intellectuals," including, or especially, the women, have "only hostile feelings toward the concept of a 'women's movement'." They are trying to figure out how to shore up the men; how to deal with such dismal realities as the fact that, despite the desperate need for solid responsible role models, young men with university degrees in pedagogy are uniformly rejected for work in children's

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homes – "always by the decision of a female bureaucrat" – because men are not "needed" for such jobs. Of the five thousand children's homes in the Soviet Union, only one has a male director. Unsurprising, then, is Gray's conclusion: "After dozens of evenings spent with distraught, henpecked men and with a dismaying abundance of superwomen, I reached the conclusion that the Soviet Union might be as much in need of a men's movement as of a women's movement."

There is, however an "on the other hand," and it goes like this. Despite the formidable willfulness of Soviet women, their domination of domesticity, including household finances, and their reign over emotional relations, life for Soviet women is hard. Very hard; indeed, almost unbelievably grim by Western standards. The Soviet Union has the highest abortion rate in the world: the average Soviet woman will have seven abortions in her lifetime. There are between five and eight abortions for every live birth. Health care is abysmal. The Soviet Union ranks fiftieth in infant mortality. Gray found that women have "little or nothing to say about the conduct of their labor." She heard one horror story after another from Soviet women about "the terrors of their birthing experience." One Xenia Velembovskaya told Gray, "The brutality of our maternity wards is the best contraceptive method we have; very few of us ever want to go through it again." Gray's visits to Soviet maternity wards confirmed what she was told. With shockingly few exceptions, maternity wards were shabby, dirty, understaffed. Infants routinely come home with staphylococcus infections from aseptic births in deteriorated hospitals.

Children's health continues to suffer in overcrowded, dingy day-care institutions. Stories abound of day-care workers adulterating children's rations so they can make off with milk and meat; "of centers so understaffed that their supervisors keep windows open throughout the coldest days, deliberately inducing respiratory infections in order that more children might stay home." One of the most radical actions a Soviet woman can take is to stay home with her children. "Defying the system by sitting home, refusing to be the prolifically versatile national heroine, dropping out of jobs and day-care programs: Housewife with many children as radical dissenter – that, I mused at the visit's end, would strike many American women as a most curious model." There is more. 'Liberated' into the world of wage labor, women are ninety-eight percent of the nation's janitors and street cleaners, ninety percent of conveyor-belt operators, thirty-three percent of railroad workers, and over sixty percent of highway construction and warehouse crews. Much of it is heavy, often damaging physical labor. It is low-paid – nearly half of Soviet women are employed in unskilled manual labor or low-skilled industrial work. And half of their salaries go for food. Even those in skilled jobs – lots of women are teachers and doctors – find the work low-paying and lacking in prestige. Small wonder that the notion of an "equal right

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to carry hundred-pound sacks of grain or bricks" rings hollow and invites only bitter disdain from Soviet women. Add to lousy pay and long hours "the nightmares of Soviet women's daily life" – and Gray details the food shortages, the "eternal queues," the constantly ill children, the dearth "of the most basic household implements or services" and passive, sullen husbands – and you have a vision of dystopia.

There remains, of course, the famous Russian hospitality; the generosity (often enough) to visitors; the humor to persevere however rotten things get, and you find a picture of tough human beings in a tough way of life. The Soviet women who have commented on Gray's book say it hits the mark, uncannily, sympathetically. Tolstaya writes that Gray "did not force herself on Russian women with ready-made, one-size-fits-all stereotypes; she didn't wave preconceived formulas for the reorganizing of Russian women's lives at them and didn't exclaim, 'Horrors! Shame!' as have – in all sincerity – many of her more simple-minded compatriots." Bravo, then, for this brave and touching volume which all but the most ideologically unwavering (in other words, simple-minded) will find illuminating: a testament to the human spirit in all its most noble and unsavory aspects.

JEAN BETHKE ELSHTAIN

EXTREME MEASURES

HARP LAKE. By John Hollander. Alfred A. Knopf. $16.95.
NO TRAVELLER. By Richard Howard. Alfred A. Knopf. $18.95.
THE INNER ROOM. By James Merrill. Alfred A. Knopf. $16.95.

Almost as if in step with one another, three of our major poets have recently published ambitious collections. John Hollander, Richard Howard, and James Merrill hit their stride in the fifties and early sixties, and by now have a clear command of the road. They also have the dubious honor of being associated with the rumor, to rephrase Eliot, that verse has been enslaved (again); they are said to perpetrate "formal poetry" in spite of the liberating imperative of our epoch. In their diversity and daring, the three books in question offer a Houdini-like escape from the tedious debate, recently revived with dogmatic heat on both sides, over the relative virtues of "free" and "formal" verse.

Insofar as it is useful to distinguish poetry from prose, the distinction can

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be maintained persuasively only by criteria enacted in poems. Given the variety of formal possibilities, including the complex tradition of *vers libre*, definitions of poetry must be inclusive and flexible, constantly violated and recreated by poets themselves. At the very least, poetry implies a specialized ordering of language that releases unusual verbal pressure by playing against unusual constraints, often focussed on the line; it would seem a further condition of poetry, as distinct from mere mechanical verse, that all its elements be susceptible to symbolic transformation. All poems, even of the marginless amoeba variety, live by a formal intelligence; strong poems live by challenging and extending that intelligence. The recent books of Hollander, Howard, and Merrill arrive at an opportune moment. Each probes self-erected boundaries and presses verse into the domains of prose and the colloquial so that we witness poetry defining itself in the only way it can: caught red-handed, in the act.

It is a merely exoskeletal remark to say that Merrill excels in conventional forms. More intimate access opens through an examination of the play of mind that generates those forms. A supremely witty poet, Merrill cherishes the lowly pun which unlocks treasure chambers for him and collapses sacred and profane realms into one. Concentrating the epic energies of *The Changing Light at Sandover* into personal lyric, *The Inner Room* continues the epic's explorations of spiritual and material reality, desire and loss, art and death, and still relies happily on the pun as a key to transfiguration. The puns pop up in the midst of elegies, as wise, outrageous, and incongruous as Shakespearean clowns. In "Farewell Performance," David Kalstone's ashes released in water appear as ". . . that gruel of selfhood / taking manlike shape for one last jeté on / ghostly – wait, ah! – point into darkness . . . "; the etymologies of "jeté" and "point" conflate balletic artifice and control with total artlessness and loss of control, life "thrown away," the "point" of death. Similarly in the long mixed-media tour de force, "Prose of Departure," which grieves in interlocking prose and rhymed haiku for a friend, Paul, dying apparently of AIDS, revelations of mortality come accompanied by sick puns, dying Paul as "the Dying Gaul."

The sickness of the puns is precisely Merrill's point. The veil of language must be rent if revelation is to occur. And Merrill is, above all, a poet of revelation, whose work has always been the charting of "mental sleights and tints and taints untold" (from "Menu"), nudging the numinous out of the promiscuous phonetics of the profane. At the conclusion of "Prose of Departure," the travelling lovers have made up their quarrel, haiku plays in harmony with the prose sentence, and "dying" has been aligned with "dyeing":

> Dyeing. A homophone deepens the trope. Surrendering to Earth's colors, shall we not *be* Earth before we know it? Venerated therefore is

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> the skill which, prior to immersion, inflicts upon a sacrificial length of crepe de Chine certain intricate knottings no hue can touch, so that one fine day, painstakingly unbound, the terminal gooseflesh, the fable's whole eccentric
>
> star-puckered moral –
> white, never-to-blossom buds
> of the mountain laurel –
>
> may be read as having emerged triumphant from the vats of night.

William Empson's essay on Pope, "Wit in 'The Essay on Criticism'," enters handily into a consideration of the range of Merrill's wit. Both poets use an exquisite social tone as a medium in itself; it could be said of Merrill, as Empson said of Pope, that "he set out to combine the seventeenth and nineteenth century notions of wit, range of imaginative power with bright social criticism." At just those places in Merrill where one appears to be skating most blithely over the surface, trapdoors gape and one plunges to the depths of a phrase or quip. The trapdoor linking the various senses of "wit," joke to genius, is often the pun. In the love poem "Serenade" the slogan MUTUAL LIFE prefigures a personal promise; "Losing the Marbles," which stages loss and restoration in terms of aphasia, brilliantly undermines (and restores) itself as it undermines the fiction of personal authorship: "Yet should milk spilt . . . / white out the sense and mutilate the phrase, / my text is Mind no less than Mallarmé's."

Language in Merrill is mind, and also "mined": excavated for ore as well as booby-trapped. The pun is just one in a whole arsenal of devices exploding the literal and vibrating likeness against difference, with rhythmic and syllabic pattern, rhyme, alliteration, metaphor no sooner claiming identity than semantic entropy insists otherwise. As it has in the past, the mirror serves as the figure for such a reflective art. Framing and recasting the image, the mirror distorts even as it composes; its fiction of significant form operates as a pervasive principle throughout Merrill's work, on every level; the poems are microcosms of a highly formed and highly threatened universe. Stephen Yenser has remarked that the figure ABBA works for Merrill as the Aramaic name for God, a rhyme pattern, and chiasm; it continues to obsess *The Inner Room*, appearing for example in the mirrored and slyly erotic stanzas of "Little Fallacy," in the father/son reflection of "Arabian Night" ("Rime's Emir"), and in "Anagram/Anagramme" in which English "pain" and "soil" are rescued in French as "pain" and "lois."

The volume abounds in traditional forms, including sonnets and sapphics, microcosms for collisions of order and disorder. Is Merrill merely a Parnassian? He has anticipated the charge in the sonnet "The Parnassians," a minor *ars poetica* in its blend of the quotidian and the ornate, and its clinching economic crudeness. That final awareness of Necessity exerts a galvanizing

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pressure on all the poems. In their many theatrical allusions they set the formal consolations of art against the mortal wilderness; they range the frontier between immortal and mortal, between the highly formed and the formless, as in the section of "Prose of Departure" called "Sanctum." We have just learned, obliquely, of Paul's death; we have visited a vulgar golden pagoda; suddenly the prose enjambs into haiku and into grief and reverence, only to veer right out again into the open-ended prose of life and death which closes the section:

> . . . someone – myself perhaps – tries vainly
>
> to hold back a queer
> sob. Inhaling the holy
> smoke, praying for dear
> life –

In the space between "dear" and "life" Merrill proves himself both a profoundly formal and informal poet, one who has found in the resources of his – our! – language, including cliché, the Baudelairean secret of turning lead to gold.

Merrill's "Walks in Rome" envisions death transfigured as both game and theater: "Gladiators' nets, the mortal / Fling and pounce reborn, over the ages, / as play." He could be describing Richard Howard's *No Traveller*, a book whose wit verges on frenzy. Empson's observations on wit apply as well to Howard as to Merrill, but the plunges in Howard's poems from surface joke to revelation are more vertiginous; darker forces are conjured and held at bay; the poems reach toward sacred and obscene extremes. Our contemporary master of the dramatic monologue, Howard has by now perfected a line with such taut tendons that it can mime the nuances of the speaking voice and keep pace with its dangerous incitements.

The ludic impulse throughout *No Traveller* is erotic: art and love interpenetrate in these poems as "Sacred Games in which the lost / god was recovered . . . " ("Oracles"). We are close to the world of *Antony and Cleopatra*. "Oracles," a monologue by an elderly woman archaeologist, describes sacred prostitution linked to oracles, and in its blend of smut and spiritual intelligence sets the tone for the volume which it concludes:

> . . . it seems
> to have been *de rigueur*
> to invite the god by erotic
> excitement. Reluctantly
> at first, the god came more readily
> once the habit had been formed
> of entering the same vessel . . .

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No Traveller is almost single-minded in its variations on the theme of erotic and artistic revelation. It stages these revelations, or failures thereof, almost entirely abroad, especially in Paris, which in view of the book's title comes to stand for a state of aesthetic possibility rather than a geographical location. Rites of conjuring often depend on a medium; Howard displaces his summoned voices into ventriloquist's impersonations of artistic figures such as Wallace Stevens, Loie Fuller, Proust, Rodin, Wordsworth, Fuseli, Kafka, and Woolf. Through them, the poems reach into recesses of desire, sometimes stirring up second-level totems: Byron for Woolf, Saint Sebastian for Kafka, Fuseli for the Victorian painter of "The Foreigner Remembered by a Local Man." Others, bitter and comic Poems of Experience, insist more on the forces of repression and distortion; the social arrangements of "Triangulations" depend on sterility and benzedrine; Wordsworth is imagined writing in horrified fascination to a friend about "a pair of popinjays" who have rented a nearby cottage; Rodin's Scotch admirer in "A Sorcerer's Apprentice" is transfixed by the prospect of a large and literal *membrum virile* in marble.

Repression and desire play out within the containments and unleashings of meter and its attendant orders: rhyme, alliteration, assonance. The long epistolary poem "Even in Paris" exults in such Apollonian/Dionysian prosody, and since it resumes as well the dominant themes of the book, it calls for and rewards particular attention. Two worlds, Empson's polar senses of wit, oppose one another in the alternating Parisian letters to a friend in America from "Ivo" and "Richard." Ivo, who initiates the series, is all sparkling surface; he cultivates his "Sapphic goose-girls, / Romaine, Rachilde, and Ida Rubenstein," and the aging Nathalie Barney, and entertains himself by entertaining relics of aristocracy at the *Tour d'Argent*. His is the voice of gossip and cynical pleasure: "All I ask is someone / to make me fervent, and I'll do his / bedding . . ." His verse, in variable syllabics, seems to court colloquial chaos, though its ligatures are in fact tightly drawn and suspend occasional pentameters and trochaic densities like "fallow still, and French as well." Richard (a ghostly variant of the author?) personifies the other expatriate vision of Paris: worship of art. No less worldly than Ivo, but dedicated to aesthetic rather than social ritual, he finds his god incarnate in Wallace Stevens, imagined on a secret trip to France.

The poem works by oppositions. Richard's verse, Stevensian pentameter spiced with latent alexandrines, counterpoints Ivo's syllabics; French dallies with English, verse with prose, snobbery with art. The third force, subsuming opposition, is Stevens, the "old absquatulator" ("a factitious word," the O. E. D. charmingly instructs, meaning one who makes off or decamps). Precipitated in epigrams and *discours*, Stevens is imagined embracing a spiritualized eros through Whitman and Monet, ecstatic in the "temple" of

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the waterlilies, and releasing a French translation of *Leaves of Grass* to the Seine. "Wallace" to Ivo's "Wallis" (the Duchess of Windsor), he absorbs Richard's adulation and Ivo's doubt, and in his delight and renunciation embodies Howard's own votive offering to the reconciliation of desire with wisdom, a vision not unlike that of the archaeologist of "Oracles" with her "unfulfilled longing for what / has vanished." In poetic formality, Howard both celebrates and transmutes desire. The act of releasing the poems to the river stands as a figure for the various sacrifices of selfhood inherent in translation and in love, sacrifices which in *No Traveller* appear as redemptive as they are ecstatic.

John Hollander's *Harp Lake*, which extends the figurative preoccupations of *In Time & Place* (1986) and interprets sensuously the essays of *Melodious Guile* (1988), shares the Symbolist inheritance of Merrill and Howard but stakes out lyric high ground of its own. Whereas puns in Merrill and Howard suggest a carnivalesque fertility, a spawning of primitive and often erotic energies, Hollander's no less witty *double entendres* constitute a metaphysical program, a continuous sublimation of the literal to a hushed and rarefied state. They can be unruly, despite their vatic purpose: "The fierce heat of the yapping dog-days chases / The black *cattivo tempo* of a cold / July . . ." ("Leaves from an Almanac"). Merrill's autobiographical data and Howard's detailed monologues give way, in Hollander, to essences, fables and figures conceived almost as abstractly as spiritual algebra. His undersong echoes the Psalms, Genesis, and the gardens of Spenser and Milton; he welcomes the demotic, chastens it and embeds it in a monumental syntax and a vocabulary of resonant indefiniteness.

Of the three poets, Hollander is the most "metapoetical." His forms seem microcosms of myths of human order, Eden and Jerusalem; gardens and cities haunt the poems and spur meditation on poetry itself as imaginative and ethical order. "The Trimmer," for instance, alternates superficially prosy octosyllabics with prose passages that turn out to be rhymed tetrameters in drag. The Trimmer, "with straight, unpainted clippers and a skilled, caressing shaping hand," represents, of course, the instinct to form, which answers to a need far deeper than that of decoration:

> I have beaten scythes into my
> Shears, ploughshares into my chainsaw,
> To war not on excess, but on
> The choking ramifications
> Of the literal. What nature
> Shaped into wilderness became
> The stony fate of gardens forced
> Into green incivility.

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The passage can stand as an emblem of Hollander's enterprise, a tribute to the human capacity to shape symbols, to imagine and enact a communal fate, "Each opening of shears a breath / Of meaning, our hedge against death." The "hedge" of his verse stands against Death only because his varied forms admit within their borders such disorder, a Kabbalistic shattering as the condition of creation.

The City poems proffer emblems also. Themes of loss and restitution, explored later in the collection in the lovely sapphics "A Find" and "A Thing So Small," initiate the book in the spacious context of Jewish history in the opening poems "Kinneret," "From the Old City," and "From the Inner City." The volume unfolds under the dual signs of harp and water, the harp of the Psalms, and Kinneret, the harp-shaped lake, the Sea of Galilee which sets the undersong of exile. The Jerusalem poems bear deeply in mind the two destructions of the Temple and its symbolic restitution: ". . . that the false / Corpus of age falls away / Before the truth that was and / Is now and ever shall be / Figured, not builded of stone" ("From the Old City"). With a kind of chaste (and justified) bravura, the poet in "From the Inner City" places himself under the protection of Psalm 137, and invokes Genesis as well:

> . . . I have recalled
> Thee: my opened book now hung
> From one of these trees, its leaves
> Silent on the windless bough,
> I remember now the old
> City that is the inward
> Place of wisdom. If its walls
> Never rose to the music
> Of enterprise, they never
> Fell to any kind of fire.

Hollander's syntax calls for special note. It appears at times as if Gertrude Stein had had an affair with Andrew Marvell to produce these twining and propulsive periods, which put great stress on tiny parts of speech. A master of the dangling preposition, Hollander can make finishing a sentence an aerobic and exhilarating feat. A case in point is the ekphrastic showpiece "Effet de Neige," accompanied by a reproduction of its source, a Monet snow scene. A dialogue between imperial *logos* ("Saying") and silently eloquent "Seeing," the poem is too complex for quick analysis, but part of its plot has to do with the way in which locomotive prepositions carry the eye further and further into the painting.

Merrill, Howard, and Hollander celebrate communions with the "great dead" of one stripe or another. Each partakes in what Auden/Mirabell/Merrill in *Mirabell* in 1978 called the GREENWOOD PERSPECTIVES OF THE

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MOTHER TONGUE. Each is a master but understands how little that mastery has to do with being bent ON DOING YR OWN THING: EACH TINY BIT / (PARDON MME) MADE PERSONAL AS SHIT (*Mirabell*). In such acknowledgements they have tested and proved their callings in voices now grown unmistakable. John Hollander's "The Widener Burying Ground" seems therefore a fitting conclusion in its insistence ". . . that / The dead whom we are shouting at, / Though silent to us now, have spoken / Through us, their stony stillness broken / By our outcry . . ." None of these poets has cried in vain.

ROSANNA WARREN

TRADITION AND POETRY

TO SCORCH OR FREEZE: POEMS ABOUT THE SACRED.
By Donald Davie. University of Chicago Press. $24.00.
COLLECTED POEMS. By Geoffrey Hill.
Oxford University Press. $22.95.

We have here two English poets, both well known, though one is comparatively young and the other a true veteran. What do they have in common? A great deal: they are both traditionalists. They know and reflect their English nurture and sense of English history. Both make use of the King James version of the Bible and of the traditional versions of the Book of Common Prayer. Though each has his own way, the poetry of both speaks clearly of their ritualistic, theological, and ecclesiastical backgrounds.

Yet neither poet could possibly be mistaken for the other. Little if anything in Geoffrey Hill's *Collected Poems* manifests any resemblance to what one finds in Donald Davie's recent volume. Clearly, a powerful tradition emanating from the Church of England can express itself in very different types of verse and in different modes of poetry.

Hill's verse is strenuous, muscled, energetic, and often quite complex. It has the drive of strong passion, but this does not necessarily simplify his language, whose energy is far from aimless: its concreteness, compression, and vigorous metaphorical quality articulate the impassioned speech and give it point and discrimination. This interweaving of intellect and emotion is to be found in Hill's very earliest poetry and can be seen in the poems of his first volume, *For the Unfallen*, published in 1959.

Take the last two stanzas of "The Guardians," a rather direct state-

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ment about the social function of the elders in any society. The poem begins with the young and their excursions beyond the "bay mouth":

> The old watch them. They have watched the safe
> Packed harbours topple under sudden gales,
> Great tides irrupt, yachts burn at the wharf
> That on clean seas pitched their effective sails.
>
> There are silences. These, too, they endure:
> Soft comings-on; soft after-shocks of calm.
> Quietly they wade the disturbed shore;
> Gather the dead as the first dead scrape home.

Here as so often in the poetry of Hill, a general statement is caught up in a concrete form.

This tightly intermeshed logic, image, and grammar achieves a closer and more graceful organization in Hill's later verse. "Pavana Dolorosa" in his 1978 volume, *Tenebrae*, is a good example. The speaker says that:

> Loves I allow and passions I approve:
> Ash-Wednesday feasts, ascetic opulence . . .

but he goes on to berate himself for such negative and self-wounding gestures and in the sestet states firmly what lies in store for himself:

> Self-seeking hunter of forms, there is no end
> to such pursuits. None can revoke your cry.
> Your silence is an ecstasy of sound
>
> and your nocturnals blaze upon the day.
> I founder in desire for things unfound.
> I stay amid the things that will not stay.

Hill's athletic handling of metaphor and his incessant confrontations of the orthodox world with the claims of twentieth century secularism have a deep relation to a basic issue in history and thought, something that Walker Percy has recently called "the San Andreas fault of the modern mind," the chasm between the world outside man's mind, the world that the "hard sciences" have so triumphantly measured, explored, and put to use – our secular world – and the world of man's inner self. René Descartes in the seventeenth century was the first to identify this chasm, but since his time, its implications have developed in a startling fashion. For the typical emancipated individual of today, the objective truth has more and more become only that which can be established by scientific testing. The meanings which for ages

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were thought to provoke the special, even the "human," character of our world, have come to seem fragile, merely subjective projections.

Who will feel this loss more poignantly than the modernist who has been brought up in a knowledge of the old and venerated patterns but now is thoroughly aware of the threat to them? Hill's poetry is very much concerned with the conflict because he sees with particular intensity what the loss entails, for poetry, far more even than theology and philosophy, is concrete. It deals with images and metaphors, and in its attempts to get beyond the world of sense it must use the medium of language, itself drawn from the world of things.

Hill faces the problem directly. In one of the sonnets in *King Log* (1986) he writes:

> Let mind be more precious than soul; it will not
> Endure. Soul grasps its price, begs its own peace,
> Settles with tears and sweat, is possibly
> indestructible. That I can believe.
> Though I would scorn the mere instinct of faith . . .

One notes that even here in this context the soul, however immaterial, can shed "tears" and "sweat," liquids that are warm, salty, and have "quite human" odors.

In "The Bidden Guest," physical detail has nearly everything to do with bringing home a powerful sense of emptiness – of the guest bidden to the sacramental feast but who cannot respond to that which is beyond the world of sense. At the end of the service we find:

> But now I hear,
> Like shifted blows at my numb back,
> A grinding heel; a scraped chair.
> The heart's tough shell is still to crack
> When, spent of all its wine and bread,
> Unwinkingly the altar lies
> Wreathed in its sour breath, cold and dead.
> A server has put out its eyes.

When the server has extinguished the two candles the altar seems as helpless as a blinded man.

Hill's poetry has much to say to the believer about his faith, including the difficulties in maintaining it in our present world, but it also has a great deal to say to the unbeliever as well. For truth about the human condition is always valuable and harder to come by than one might first suppose. Before going any further, I ought to say that I have thus far stressed one mode of

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Hill's poetry. His *Mercian Hymns* (1971) reveals a very different sort of poet. These "hymns" are scarcely singable. They are written in a very free verse, printed as short prose paragraphs. They are half-serious, half-playful, bodying forth a self-conscious regionalism. Although his intent is serious, he is relaxed, having his bit of fun.

The poems of *Tenebrae* and *Hymns to the Lady of Chartres* (1984) return directly to spiritual struggle. Here are the ardors, claims, and restrictions of the spiritual world, but here also is the challenge to them offered by the powerful, secular modern world. The poetry is passionate but the play of intellect incessant. Nor is Hill's concern for the human domain of the here and now ever shrouded under a cloud of dead ecclesiastical dust. It is quick and plangent.

All of Hill's poetry has continually made contact with our world of know-how and process and history. The titles of his poems say as much. Here are a few: "Commerce and Society," "Ovid and the Third Reich," "History as Poetry," "Ode on the Loss of the Titanic," "A Short History of British India," and "Shiloh Church, 1862: Twenty-three Thousand." (This last item, as readers may know, has to do with one of the bloodiest battles of the American Civil War. The two armies together lost twenty-three thousand men, killed, wounded, or captured, comparable to the losses of the Battle of Waterloo.)

Yet whatever Hill's range in topical matter, his control is steady. Consider, for example, the sonnet, "The Eve of St. Mark":

> Stroke the small silk with your whispering hands,
> godmother; nod and nod from the half-gloom;
> broochlight intermittent between the fronds,
> the owl immortal in its crystal dome.
>
> Along the mantelpiece veined lustres trill,
> the clock discounts us with a telling chime.
> Familiar ministrants, clerks-of-appeal,
> burnish upon the threshold of the dream:
>
> churchwardens in wing-collars bearing scrolls
> of copyhold well-tinctured and well-tied.
> Your photo-albums loved by the boy-king
>
> preserve in sepia waterglass the souls
> of distant cousins, virgin till they died,
> and the lost delicate suitors who could sing.

If this example seems too delicate and smooth it would be easy to find an equally fine example of a more vigorous sort, as in "Lachrimae Coactae,"

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where the speaker confronts the "Crucified Lord," who himself "crucifies" his petitioner, a petitioner who thus falls between "harsh grace and hurtful scorn." Here are the last six lines:

> What grips me then, or what does my soul grasp?
> If I grasp nothing what is there to break?
> You are beyond me, innermost true light,
>
> uttermost exile for no exile's sake,
> king of our earth not caring to unclasp
> its void embrace, the semblance of your quiet.

Most of us, in turning to Donald Davie's *To Scorch or Freeze*, will believe that we have found something radically different from almost everything in Hill. Davie's poems are brief, short-lined, pithy, in a very loose, free verse. Rhymes occur only occasionally and sometimes seem joltingly sporadic. Yet Davie's verse, for all its modernity, is in a way also very old-fashioned. That is to say it is deeply, but almost cheerfully, Christian, and a great deal of it quotes or parodies or plays off of biblical passages, including the poetry of the Psalms. Thus, "Sing Unto the Lord a New Song" echoes Psalm 33:

> Cheerfulness in lordly
> leisure; and
> holiness in thunder and high wind.

The poet rejoices in the storm, wants it to continue:

> Imagine Him yawning, hear Him
> crack His joints as He stretches,
> magisterial!
>
> Praise the Lord upon the harp,
> sing to him on the damnable steel-guitar!

Davie's "So make them melt as the dishousèd snail" derives from and quotes from Psalm 58. His "Curtains!" recalls a number of Scriptural passages including one from the Book of Amos. Some quotations are as familiar as "So teach us to number our days . . . ." (Psalm 90: 12), and the poem entitled "And Our Eternal Home" takes its title from a familiar hymn. "The Creature David" quotes from Psalm 104; "Saw I never the quite righteous Forsaken," from Psalm 37. When the Scriptural source is less evident, the measure and tone of Davie's passages often maintain the Scriptural note, as in "You that would bite the whole pie and / mell with the pack, yet pout yourself ill-used" or "They shall shine and run to and fro / like sparks among

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the stubble." One recalls that the subtitle of Davie's collection is "Poems About the Sacred." They are also very much poems about our modern world as it carries on its vital and often raucously noisy existence. As Hill does, Davie refrains from separating religious interest from the contagions of the modern world.

Like Hill, Davie knows his Allen Tate and sometimes alludes to him. A whole passage in Davie's poem "Zion," quoted here, refers to Tate's poem "Aeneas at Washington":

> Once, stuck in the mud by the Capitol,
> you thought of the ninth buried city,
> Richmond, Montgomery, what you had built them for,
>
> of Troy, and of Rome, of Richmond, of Rome not
> Zion . . .

In "Aeneas at Washington," Tate's Trojan hero stands in the rain:

> By the Potomac, the great Dome lit the water . . . .

His hero is later:

> Stuck in the wet mire
> Four thousand leagues from the ninth buried city

And he says:

> I thought of Troy, what we had built her for.

Why Richmond and Montgomery? Because Montgomery was the first capital of the Southern Confederacy, soon to be superseded by Richmond, Virginia. Davie is doing more than merely teasing his old friend;he has another matter in view: Man's spiritual capital ultimately ought to be seen as more important than his political capital, whether it be London or Washington or Rome itself.

The setting of Davie's poem "Nashville Mornings" embodies other references to his own personal concerns. For many years he taught in Nashville at Vanderbilt University. Nashville's old claim to be "the Athens of the South" has more and more been superseded by its new title as "the Home of Country Music." The reference to Elvis Presley and his platinum-plated Rolls and to the tourists crowding the road out to see the homes of the stars attests as much. In such an environment St. Cecilia does indeed "irk" on Nashville mornings. But the poet who means to write about sacred things has to be scrupulously honest and face the brute facts, including, along with more

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important items, the "damnable steel-guitar." Davie admonishes us:

> Speak if you cannot sing.
> Utter with appropriate shudders
> the extremities of God's arctic
> where all the rivers are frozen,
> and how He tempers our exile
> with an undeserved planting of willows.

The present volume does not represent Davie's accomplishment as a poet as Hill's *Collected Poems* represents his own splendid accomplishment to date. *To Scorch or Freeze* is only one of the fifteen volumes of poetry that Davie has published in his lifetime, and I have taken some pains to indicate how special are the poems it contains.

Yet, the two books of poetry discussed here point to a rich resource quite unavailable to most contemporary American poets: the Anglican Church tradition which in earlier centuries did so much to influence the English language and literature. Both of these modern poets indicate what power it still possesses when used by those who know it well and are able to bring it sharply to bear on the problems of a modern world. If it were used only as antique embellishment or sentimental escape from modern problems the resultant poetry would be instead a pretentious disaster.

CLEANTH BROOKS

THE PERIPHERY AND THE CENTER

THE AFTERNOON OF A WRITER. By Peter Handke. Translated by Ralph Mannheim. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $14.95.
BECOMING A POET: ELIZABETH BISHOP WITH MARIANNE MOORE AND ROBERT LOWELL. By David Kalstone. Farrar, Straus & Giroux. $22.50.
REAL PRESENCES. By George Steiner. University of Chicago Press. $19.95.
NEW AND SELECTED ESSAYS. By Robert Penn Warren. Random House. $24.95.

The central subject these four books variously concern is literature. Seen through the successive lens of each book, the subject wavers and

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changes: literature focuses on or narrows into poetry, which unfolds into the writer's friendships in relation to her work and life, considerations which, falling away, reveal a landscape (or an inscape) of bleak solitude – a landscape which Steiner, in the last of these books, sees as a darkening plain, dim in the twilight of the gods.

Moving chronologically from Warren's genial considerations of writers and their work, of what a poem actually means to its readers, to Steiner's grim evocations of our age as an afterword, a mere epilogue, it's hard not to trace a plot whose downward curve droops like a distressed mouth. Referring to the celebrated sled ride ("Marie, Marie, hold on tight") in "The Waste Land," Northrop Frye has called such a plot the "down we went" vision of history.

Since Robert Penn Warren died (in September 1989) not long after the publication of his *New and Selected Essays*, the collection has the elegiac feel of a posthumous volume (and the note of elegy is sounded again by each of the other authors in turn). Yet although some of the essays date back to the 1940s and 50s, readers expecting a consistently New Critical mode of discourse will be disappointed. Any reader of Warren's own fiction and poetry knows that here was a writer entranced by the personages and place names of a particular locale – that any aseptic notion of the poem as unencumbered artifact is alien to Warren's distinctive style. He doesn't find it necessary to divest himself of his own personality when writing criticism; he doesn't don the white robes of the specialist or conceal himself behind a priestly jargon.

A repeated theme of this rich and varied book is Warren's refusal of reductive reasonings, of severely schematizing systems which in order to reduce poems to some ideal silhouette would force the poet to follow a recipe. In "Pure and Impure Poetry," an essay first delivered as a lecture in 1942, Warren makes a useful list of some of the elements critics have at one time or another demanded be purged from poems. He names a few and writes in an equable tone, but the self-defeating draconian ferocity of the list is a testament – as eloquent as it was nearly half a century ago – to the arbitrary and restrictive flailings of theory. I can't resist quoting the list in full:

1. ideas, truths, generalizations, "meaning"
2. precise, complicated, "intellectual" images
3. unbeautiful, disagreeable, or neutral materials
4. situation, narrative, logical transition
5. realistic details, exact descriptions, realism in general
6. shifts in tone or mood
7. irony
8. metrical variation, dramatic adaptations of rhythm, cacophony, etc.
9. meter itself
10. subjective and personal elements.

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Warren's critical practice in the essays, lectures, and introductions gathered here is relaxed, often occasional, and sometimes celebratory. The general mode is discursive rather than analytical, yet Warren returns again and again to what literature means – not by magisterial generalizations (the above list sufficiently indicates his distrust of edicts) but in the context of a particular author or work or even phrase. The very fact that Warren has chosen to discuss a work guarantees that it has meaning for him and through him perhaps for us. Nor is such significance vitiated by the fact that meaning is anything but monolithic:

> I do not intend to say merely that a poem has different meanings for different readers, but that it may have different meanings for the same reader . . . First, it is clear that a poem has meaning when placed in different perspectives of interest. We may look at it as a document in the history of a language, or in a thousand other different perspectives . . . The reader, from outside the poem, prescribes the particular perspective in which the poem is to be placed.
>
> ("A Poem of Pure Imagination," 1946)

Not that Warren espouses a slack, anything-goes relativism. His ear is too good, for one thing. Writing of John Crowe Ransom's critical works, but surely with a glance at any truly distinctive style, he notes:

> The style bespeaks an individual; and more significantly, even at its most rigorous, the critical effort may be felt as involving a social occasion, conversation with a glass in hand by the fireside, or on a summer afternoon under the maples, and the courtesies of the occasion are there. As the prose stems from the human depth and fullness behind the critical effort, so one recognizes in its rhythms and its wit, in its tone, the author's awareness of the reader as a friendly but independent other. The air is not that of a lecture, of a demonstration, but of a dialogue, of a collaborative quest.
>
> ("Notes on the Poetry of John Crowe Ransom," 1968)

Dialogue and collaborative quest are apt descriptions of Warren's own approach, which is authoritative without pomposity and accessible without breathing in our faces. Tact, charm, ease – these qualities, evident in all the works collected here, are if anything more striking in "The Use of the Past" (1977) than in pieces written decades earlier. Much honored both before and after his death as a grand old man of American letters, Warren may be a

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gracious ghost of a bygone moment, but he writes with a lack of pretention that makes the reader his peer.

If Warren's essays, even before the author's death, had a retrospective force, the note struck by David Kalstone's *Becoming a Poet* is of several simultaneous kinds of loss. Dying as he did in 1986 (he was only fifty-four), Kalstone left the book unfinished. It has been gracefully rounded off, rather than completed, by Robert Hemenway; and James Merrill contributes a poignant Afterword which makes no claims to the authority of closure ("a note on which to let this book break off," writes Merrill; he chooses not to say "to let this book end."). Nor is Kalstone's the only death informing these pages. At the time he was working on the book, both Lowell and Bishop had died recently – and suddenly (he in 1977, she in 1979).

Writers live their lives, recapture their pasts, do their work as best they can; and Kalstone's book could serve, as Hemenway notes,

> as an excellent *vade mecum* for writers – a guide to becoming a poet – for he offers a paradigm that has much to say about how writers ought to (and alas, how they sometimes do) behave. In going at their work, in going about the process of living.

What is not often given to writers, especially in a book like this one whose last chapter remains unwritten, is to say goodbye. Bishop did write an elegy for Lowell; and her matchless villanelle, "One Art," is one of the great farewells in the language, characteristically couched as casual anecdote and advice. Still, I think it is more than the premature silencing of Kalstone's own uniquely perspicacious, gentle, and patient voice that makes the abrupt deaths of Bishop and Lowell in this book so shocking. The network cut short by death is one painstakingly woven over the course of a lifetime. Years of dialogue, doubt, revision, friendship, scruple, intimacy, nuance, retreat, and renewal don't decrescendo, they simply cease. As Bishop's Robinson Crusoe puts it in "Crusoe in England," "And then one day they came and took us off."

Not that this book makes for gloomy reading: it is often funny and always fascinating, whether what we learn of is Marianne Moore's binding relationship with her mother or Lowell's insolent rewriting of some of Bishop's best work (or for that matter, Moore's "correction" of Bishop's "Roosters" – what was it about Bishop that gave her friends the urge to improve upon perfection?). In Bishop's famous phrase in "The Bight," many of the details of these intertwined lives are "awful but cheerful." If *Becoming a Poet* leaves in the reader's mouth a lingering taste of elegy, it is not only because Moore and Bishop, Lowell, and Kalstone himself will write no more. We'd better brush up on our skill at losing things, for other elements seem to

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have disappeared as well, and it is for them too that this book is an elegy. The indisputable (however delicate) connection between a life and a work is one of these. Kalstone doesn't force material roughly into certain molds, nor does he pull aside the curtains of the personal with prurient relish to reveal ineffable intimacies. What he does – what he did – do is to read, reread, and luminously write about the work while at the same time carefully following the written record of the lived life. The resulting aura of perception illuminates the lives, which then shine back onto the work.

"We write and rewrite literary history," Kalstone says in his unfinished introduction. "It becomes increasingly clear, the more we know about Elizabeth Bishop, that she makes us describe poetry in a different light . . ." But the "we" Kalstone confidently conjures up here – who are we, or they? Can such a we be said to exist? The different lights in which poetry is described, like the ways in which literary history is currently being rewritten, include lights that do not (in Warren's words) bespeak an individual but rather address problems of gender, society, canon. Like so many hasty partitions subdividing rooms into cubbyholes, classifications have sprung up and ramified into a labyrinth where the poetry itself can easily get lost. Annoyed at facile comparisons of her work to that of Marianne Moore, Bishop wrote to the older poet in 1954:

> I think my approach is so much vaguer and less defined and certainly more old-fashioned – sometimes I'm amazed at people's comparing me to you when all I'm doing is some kind of blank verse – can't they *see* how different it is? But they can't apparently.

Categories are the enemy of patient rereadings and rediscoveries such as Kalstone gives us. Busy placing the work in this or that niche or sect, few critics writing today take the time to consider the work of art with the kind of intent abstraction – disinterest, even – that Bishop evokes in a passage whose eloquence surely has some self-referential component:

> What one seems to want in art, in experiencing it, is the same thing that is necessary for its creation, a self-forgetful, perfectly useless concentration.

The light touch – ironic even in its seriousness – of that "perfectly useless" fades to a sardonic but still recognizable flicker in Peter Handke's vision of what it is to be a writer. *The Afternoon of a Writer* calls itself a novel, but it seems to me to bear as much relation to one as *The Cherry Orchard* does to its self-proclaimed genre of comedy. The concentration at work throughout

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this – let us call it a novella – is anything but self-forgetful: the writer's mind is relentlessly focussed on that illegible and fugitive entity, itself. His morning's work done, the writer goes downstairs, leaves his empty house, takes a walk through the town – seeking the solace of movement, change, company? Nothing quite so simple; Handke deftly thwarts any symmetrical expectations. For example, leaving the house:

> On his way to the garden gate, the writer suddenly turned around. He rushed into the house and up to his study and substituted one word for another.

Nor is his progress easy once he does get outside. In this world, simple ways of getting from one place to another are not the point:

> The writer stopped at the crossroads longer than usual. Perhaps because his profession did not impose a hard-and-fast schedule, he seemed to need an idea to carry him through the most trifling daily movements; the idea that came to him was to combine the periphery with the center by crossing the inner city on his way to the outskirts.

If the writer is, in spite of himself, a center of consciousness – both his own and perhaps other people's as well – he is also marginal. This paradox, as uncomfortable as writer's cramp, is what Handke elegantly explores in a book which is no less luminous for being hard to classify. As the writer makes his way through town, and through the mazes of his mind, images of edges take on the force of a leitmotif, as do scenes of experience's illegibility: anonymous letters, unreadable postcard, muttering madman, amnesiac woman. Handke's precise, elegantly translated prose cries out for quotation on page after page, but I'll restrict myself to one more passage – a *cri de coeur* that twists the kaleidoscope of genre from novella to the opening of the first Duino elegy:

> . . . now he was able to question himself systematically – as he could not in his dreams – about his problem, the problem of writing, describing, storytelling. What was his business, the business of a writer? Was there any such business in this century? Was there anyone, for example, whose deeds and sufferings cried out to be recorded, catalogued, and publicized in history books but also to be handed down in the form of an epic or perhaps only of a little song? To what god was it still possible to intone a hymn of praise? (And who could still summon up the strength to lament the absence of a god?)

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That pressingly parenthesized question is answered by the last and darkest of our four books: George Steiner, that's who. If Handke maps the margin of a city and a life, Steiner begins his argument with a strenuous excoriation of what he calls our "secondary city" – the "usages and values predominant in the consumer societies of the West today . . . [where] it is the secondary and the parasitic which overwhelm." The elegiac tone that Warren's or Kalstone's critical practice, as well as their recent deaths, bestow on their books, and that permeates the world of Handke's nameless writer with a sense of bemusement and belatedness, comes out in Steiner as a full-throated jeremiad. In keeping with this genre, Steiner is most eloquent in condemnation. With mordant relish he concisely evokes (since he cannot count) "the volume of secondary discourse at the level of critical-academic interpretation and evaluation." The following passage is a fair sample of the acrid glee with which Steiner tells us about the current state of affairs – or rather not us, but "the reader-consumer outside the academy and the art and music worlds [who] has little idea of the pertinent dimensions" (and who would hardly be likely to read this book):

> In the field of modern literature alone, Russian and Western universities are thought to register some thirty thousand doctoral theses *per annum*. An average college or university library will need to stock some three to four thousand periodicals in the humanities. These include learned and critical journals on poetry, drama, and fiction; musicological and music-critical journals; quarterlies and research bulletins in the history and criticism of the fine arts. Periodical publications in theoretical and formal aesthetics multiply. The several thousand learned societies, specialized associations, organizations of literary historians, musicologists, friends of *belles lettres*, art historians, students of the ballet, of the theatre, of one or another style in architecture, of the history and semiology of film which appear on UNESCO lists, which publish the proceedings of their passions in a more or less official and regular format, are the iceberg tip. No computer has indexed the newsletters, annual *memorabilia*, minutes of the covens which celebrate this or that rite of explication.

Covens? A critical *Walpurgisnacht*? Steiner certainly chooses his words for grotesque emphasis, but he hardly can be accused of exaggeration. Along similar lines, Alison Lurie, in her recent "Dictionary for Deconstructors," describes:

> an exhausting series of commentaries on commentaries which recall nothing so much as the productions of medieval scholasticism. To the unconverted this mass of words resembles the infinitely retreating

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> and dimming reflections in opposing mirrors.

And Lurie quotes Jonathan Culler in *Framing the Sign*: "formerly the history of criticism was part of the history of literature . . . now the history of literature is part of the history of criticism."

But Steiner won't accept this state of affairs as permanent. If the current cultural climate is a Witches' Sabbath of teeming goblins brewing ever more murky potions of commentary on commentary, this is so, we can infer, because ours is after all a Sabbatarian age. Yes, we are belated, bemired, fallen, exiled – but we are also awaiting Sunday. Our cultural chaos is pierced by longing, shot through with the consequences of the absence of God.

Yet if Friday, the day of the Crucifixion, represents the death of love, "in the face of which even the greatest art and poetry are almost helpless," the Utopian Sunday of God's return will have no place for art either. Like it or not, art belongs to a fallen world:

> The apprehensions and figurations in the play of metaphysical imagining, in the poem and the music, which tell of pain and of hope . . . are always Sabbatarian. They have risen out of an immensity of waiting which is that of man. Without them, how could we be patient?

Steiner is aware that his view, at once embattled and hopeful ("there is no word less deconstructable than hope," he writes on his last page):

> will be unacceptable not only to most of those who will read such a book as this, but also to the prevailing climate of thought and feeling in our culture. It is just this unacceptability which characterizes what I have called a time of 'epilogue,' an immanence within the logic of the 'afterword.'

Whoever does accept Steiner's view most likely held it already anyway; he is preaching to the converted, but then so is Kalstone with his vague "we." And if Steiner speaks as from a twilight of the gods (or perhaps the darkness before dawn), his very specification of the lateness of the hour ("The humanist . . . tends to feel that both dawn and noon are at his back") echoes Handke's title. These chimes are not coincidental; since the writers considered here have very different temperaments, any echoes from work to work refer to a shared Zeitgeist. When the sun sets, after all, all sorts of people notice it.

Where Steiner does differ from the other lovers of literature considered here is in his impatience. Kalstone not only pores over letters and poems, he

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rereads friendships like the palimpsests they are. Handke's writer, who finds news of our condition in the unlikeliest places, rededicates himself, against the odds, to his art:

> I started out as a storyteller. Carry on. Live and let live. Portray. Transmit. Continue to work the most ephemeral of materials, my breath; be its craftsman.

The absurdity, the tender humor of an ephemeral spirit working toward transcendence is something Steiner can admit only by way of eulogy. His extended threnody for an art which reaches out towards "real presences" leaves him little space to *say* anything much about any one work. Rather Steiner either limns, as we have seen, the choking flood of scholarship and commentary, or else he finds other ways to point out the limitations of language, as when the topic is music.

Looking through the index of *Real Presences* is a curious experience. One finds Schoenberg, Wagner, Kafka, Proust, Aeschylus, Chardin, Lascaux . . . the list goes on. But finding the names in context, if that is what it is, pulls us into the vortex of Steiner's book-length peroration, where famous names are tossed up with frantic urgency only to vanish under the next breaker. There is next to nothing about any one artist or work; all are either rhetorical exempla or, at the other extreme, points in a majestic connect-the-dots puzzle. Either way, the sense of scale is distorted: hyperbole swells Steiner's subjects and despair shrinks them. Awful and cheerful cannot, for this temperament, coexist.

Steiner knows himself to be contributing to the spate of the secondary:

> The continued production of works of exegesis and of criticism on authors, painters, sculptors and composers, already analyzed and classed a hundredfold, does afford transient pleasure, benign illusions of significance and, with luck, a certain professional niche and modest revenue for all manner of secondary souls (how could I not know and acknowledge this to be so?).

But words like modest and benign do not really fit this book, which is less commentary than lamentation. Illuminating moments shine out here and there, but they seem subordinate to a darkness whose Sabbatarian nature will be most consoling to those who are sure Sunday is coming. David Kalstone, dying of AIDS, or Robert Penn Warren at the end of his long life, seem to have drawn "benign illusions of significance" and "transient pleasure" from explorations of literature that are more modest, detailed, and perceptive

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than anything Steiner, flailing about in the twilight, has time for. What's more, that significance, however illusory, and those pleasures, however transient, have somehow been passed on to some readers, however few, benighted, and secondary they – we – are. That this reader even derived some mordant enjoyment from Steiner's denunciations may only be proof of what the author calls the enigmatic enormity of language.

RACHEL HADAS

ASHBERY'S MUSE

APRIL GALLEONS. By John Ashbery. Penguin USA. $15.95.

In John Ashbery's most recent volume "Things go on being the same," to adapt one of its deadpan observations, "As darkness and ships ruffle the sky." This is to say that its riddling meditations and its crazy-quilt narratives continually startle – and exasperate, charm, sadden, tease, and finally exhilarate in ways that his poems have been doing for some time. "I said you can catch all kinds of weird activities," Ashbery reminds us with a strange pun, and indeed we have been warned.

Among the activities we might "catch" here are the parade of flagrant non sequiturs; the seamlessly bemusing simile ("the long night glided on, / Intent on some adventure of its own, like a dog / Dreaming of a bone"); the waggish paradox; and the idiosyncratic experiment ("Finnish Rhapsody" is a puckish *tour de force* in which the second half of each line repeats the sense of the first half: "Don't fix it if it works, tinker not with that which runs apace"). Here as before we have the abrupt shift in tense or person, which makes everything seem as protean or ephemeral as – as it is, I guess, and the monstrously ambiguous pronoun "it" that refers to something like "life" or "existence" (I take it that Ashbery makes droll reference to this mannerism as well as to his ramshackle plot when he regrets in one poem rife with "its"that there is "No time . . . to dot the i's, / Cross the t's and tie everything up / In a loose bundle"). Fleetingly about themselves ("Why does he do it like

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that say it like that you might ask / Dream it like that over landscapes spotted with cream and vehement / Holes in the ground . . . ?"), the poems chase their own tails even as they work out frequently ingenious and touching structures.

Ashbery's Muse, as he identified her in one of the splendid "sonnets" in *Shadow Train*, is Forward Animation, and his poetry is preeminently a matter of enigmatic volatility. In his breath-taking version of one of Zeno's paradoxes, there is always "a more abrupt truth / That preempts . . . The hors d'oeuvres this moment is preparing." One result of his commitment to this principle is that of our durable contemporary poets he is the hardest to call up from memory. While on the one hand we might recall a given poem's general thematic coloration, and on the other hand we will remember many a poignant phrase, we will not be able to quote him at any length. Not that the glittering moments are embedded in dull magma. On the contrary, often enough a whole poem coruscates, as one turns it around and around in a good morning light. Or we could borrow from his own admiring description of Gertrude Stein and Antonin Artaud, of whom he once wrote that "just as each second of life seems to alter the whole of what has gone before, so the endless process of elaboration which gives the work of these two writers a texture of bewildering luxuriance – that of a tropical rain-forest of ideas – seems to obey some rhythmic impulse at the heart of all happening." The exotic plenitude of this volume is such that we seem already to have arrived at "a certain day of reckoning," when "Every available jug or receptacle will be seen to be full to overflowing, / Not with anything useful, just the same old stuff of imaginative / Speculation."

It is clearer and clearer that Ashbery is, fitfully, a visionary poet and that his vision, usually little more than a "glimpse," is of the abundance, the preciousness, and the mazy involvement of the elements in the world. He recalls certain novelists, from James (whose own labyrinthine elaborations he compared to Stein's) through Proust to Carlo Emilio Gadda. Writing of the latter, Calvino remarks that he "tried all his life to represent the world as a knot, a tangled skein of yarn; to represent . . . the simultaneous presence of the most disparate elements that converge to determine every event." These vagarious poems, in which "everything is always becoming a lot of things," imply a similar tissue of relations, a subject they occasionally address explicitly – as in "Sighs and Inhibitions," where "When we think we think, or turn over in our sleep, / Someone else's business is boldly attached to this."

The problem of sustaining any inkling of things as a whole is a recurrent worry in this volume. For one thing, the maze of the world alters its nature from moment to moment. "We ride and ride, and still the view comes on," as Ashbery observes with dismay in "Winter Weather Advisory"; and we write and write, and "the same old story is different / With each new telling," as he muses elsewhere. For another thing, the very *extent* of the

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relationships intuited entails a seeming loss of connection. The poems must be fragmentary because the way divides before them at every juncture. Time and again we are reminded of "The infinity of loose ends that / Is taking over our government and threatening to become life as we know it!"

So what "Winter Weather Advisory" considers "the one idea / Worth having" – which we do not have: it's like Stevens's "inconceivable idea of the sun" – is perhaps an idea that would accommodate both "loose ends" and "cohesion." In its absence we have sketches of it, as when in "Winter Weather Advisory" Ashbery argues that if we are always being stalled and diverted by "cataclysmic interruptions":

> it must be something about us
> And the way we handle this skein of time
> We are just getting to know, and the pendulum shatters
> All of it into mutually combative fragments, some bad,
> Some worth entertaining, but the complex,
> Much too complex, some would say, aviary-as-environment
> That results is the piece of real estate that one inherited long ago . .

If the "skein of time" indicates a continuous world, however raveled, and the "combative fragments" imply a world of disjunctions, the "aviary as environment" – cleverly anticipated by the term "skein," which also designates a flight of wild fowl – seems to suggest a realm in which disorder doesn't rule out patterns, "complex" though they may be.

But this sort of approximation never satisfies, and that must be one reason that on a surprising number of occasions Ashbery adopts a tone of weary resignation reminiscent of Eliot. "There are scars and stars," he admits, "Things to be met with in life, a lifetime of slow defeat." "Never to Get It Really Right" is an obsessive theme in *April Galleons*, where Ashbery admits that "so much has come unbuilt" that "I am not sure if all this is worth doing, / If any of it ever was." True, the poems seem lured on by an "imperfect vision" of the possibility that somehow "we are all going to be one, or together" – a vision amounting to a "split-second / Interval as formal as a jewel that an army of well-meaning enemies / Couldn't possibly displace. I hear it calling to me. I must turn over a new leaf." Yet even as the Rilkean "new leaf" is turned, the poem, "Unreleased Movie," swings back into the quotidian world – into "that agreeable triangle in a sea of asphalt where one so rarely has difficulty / Getting a taxi" – and then leaps into a hilarious, parodic surrealism: "I am re-created in the short-sleeved pajamas of my youth!"

So where does this leave one of our foremost poets? Still in transit, surely, between some intuited sublime, there on the mind's horizon and the

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empirical mundane, incongruous and lubricious. The beautiful and characteristically intricate title poem is a study in such shuttlings. Like Stevens's "Prologues to What Is Possible," which also invokes voyages, "April Galleons" celebrates excursions of the imagination. Its opening sentence, "something *was* burning," harks back to "Vetiver," the first poem, and its farewell to "youth . . . dry and hollow, porous to the touch," the fuel for "this bonfire" – a term that Ashbery clearly wants us to hear in its original sense. A bone-fire was a ceremonial burning of old bones that implicitly marked a beginning, and here in the book's conclusion "It was time to be off, in another / Direction, toward marshlands and cold, scrolled / Names of cities that sounded as though they existed, / But never had." The poet and his mates will perhaps return one day, "Through the torn orange veils of an early evening," but the poem insists on process so that even that moment will resemble "the gesture / Of a bird taking off." When the end of the poem repeats this cycle, the poet's "scow" is replaced by certain "swarms," which we can think of as both honeybees and metaphorically the "galleons" of the title, that "Issue forth at dawn to return in a rain of mild / Powder at night." But in their very returning, laden as with silk or gold, they remove "us from our boring and / Unsatisfactory honesty with tales of colored cities, / Of how the mist built there." In this removing of us they are like the poems – as they are in arriving also (we note the subtle phrasing in the final lines) "with . . . what were the / Directions the lepers were taking / To avoid these eyes, the old eyes of love." As the answer circles syntactically into the question that prompted the search, the seeker gets entangled with the sought, and then the poet with the reader – who is suddenly once more very grateful for whatever this weird show or meaning or means of transport is that he has been trying to "catch."

STEPHEN YENSER

POLYMORPHIC VISIONS

SIX MEMOS FOR THE NEXT MILLENNIUM. By Italo Calvino. Harvard University Press. $15.95.

Italo Calvino is best known in this country for his restlessly inventive fiction, books such as *Cosmicomics* and *Invisible Cities* that seem to stretch the boundaries of fiction itself. Ever since the 1950s Calvino also wrote sporadically but frequently on the work of other writers and on the

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possible and potential "uses" of literature. His *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* is a captivating hybrid, at once a defense of literature, a quasi-anthological personal canon, and an oblique intellectual autobiography. The book contains five of the six lectures that were to have been delivered as the Charles Eliot Norton Lectures at Harvard in 1985; because of Calvino's untimely death in the fall of that year, it reaches us formally unfinished (the sixth lecture had not been written) but, inevitably, with the force of a last will and testament. Joining postmodern sophistication with old-fashioned appreciation, Calvino's modest and cordial voice preserves a sense of wonder and a tender hopefulness toward both literature and life; in their brio and surprising peregrinations of thought, Calvino supplies us with a "pedagogy of the imagination."

Calvino begins with a glance back at the last millennium, characterized as the epoch of the European vernaculars and their literatures, and the epoch of the book itself. What, he asks, would he wish to survive on into the coming millennium? The answer comes in a set of six qualities offered for our contemplation: lightness, quickness, visibility, exactitude, multiplicity, and coherence. Each of the essays explores a number of texts, his own included, to illustrate and complicate our sense of the given quality. The illustrative texts are astonishing in their range and in proximity with one another. In the first essay alone, Calvino writes memorably about Ovid, Montale, Kundera, Lucretius, Boccaccio, Cavalcanti, Dickinson, James, Cervantes, Shakespeare, de Bergerac, Leopardi, and himself. Some of these writers return in later essays, while others emerge later with comparable importance: Galileo, Bruno, Valéry, Borges, Flaubert, Perec, and Gadda, to name the most salient. With equal alacrity Calvino cites as well folktales from a variety of cultures and scholarly works such as Paolo Zellini's *A Short History of the Infinite* and Hans Blumenberg's *The Legibility of the World*.

Although each essay is dedicated to one particular quality, there is some slippage between them as certain figures or themes return. At times the qualities seem nearly synonymous (particularly lightness and quickness), while elsewhere there is instead an attempted embrace of opposites between qualities. The essay on quickness, for example, celebrates concentration, economy, and crystallization, while the essay on multiplicity contains warm praise of the vast unfinished and encyclopedic projects of writers such as Goethe, Gadda, and Musil. That essay opens with a long citation from Gadda's densely difficult novel, *That Mess on the Via Merulana*, a surprising point of entry since Gadda is very nearly Calvino's opposite as a writer. Within certain of the essays Calvino pauses momentarily to salute the opposing value: halfway into the essay on lightness, he eulogizes weight. Doubleness determines many of the book's most trenchant formulations: "I dream of immense cosmologies, sagas, and epics, all reduced to the dimension of an epigram."

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The attempted embrace of opposites informs the book in yet other ways. Calvino is repeatedly drawn to figures that combine opposing values. He speaks lovingly of a Renaissance emblem that combines a butterfly and a crab, thereby producing an unexpected harmony. Elsewhere he celebrates the opposing virtues of the crystal and the flame, and then wishes to identify with both. In a remarkable mythographic self-exegesis, Calvino explains that he is a Saturn who wishes to be a Mercury. The figure of the balance, Calvino's astrological sign of Libra, subtends these predilections for harmonizing or balancing opposing traits.

Despite the range of texts and issues treated in the essays, certain leitmotifs appear to govern and shape the book, though Calvino more than once notes that he is going in a direction he hadn't planned on. He is consistently fascinated by the microstructures from which the luxuriant variety of the world is generated; he writes lovingly of Lucretius's atoms and motes of dust, and even of the "bits" into which we now process our information. His feeling for the miniscule particles from which all that exists is constructed and into which all that exists will be dissolved is tied to a vision of the unity and continuity of life; at the same time, Calvino, like the writers he most admires, insists on respect for the particularity and infinite variety of things.

Lucretius and Ovid are cited at the very beginning of the first essay, and once again at the conclusion of the fifth (so that the book feels as if it has come full circle, even if the projected sixth essay doesn't exist). Ovid's "continuity of forms" and Lucretius's identification with the "nature common to each and every thing" are consonant with Calvino's own imagination of continuity and unity. His favorite writers share a cosmological model that unites the infinite with the infinitessimal, a model that also subtends his own meditations on literary form and on writing itself: "The polymorphic visions of the eyes and the spirit are contained in uniform lines of small or capital letters, periods, commas, parentheses – pages of signs, packed as closely together as grains of sand, representing the many-colored spectacle of the world on a surface that is always the same and always different, like dunes shifted by the desert wind."

Calvino's literary self-reflexiveness has the potential for aridity. But in *Six Memos* the modulations of his voice and the range of the authors and issues invoked make us feel that we are not dealing with a merely literary exercise; perhaps not even a merely human one.

RACHEL JACOFF

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LETTERS

To the Editor:

In his review of Julius Lester's *Lovesong: Becoming a Jew* (*PR* 2, 1990), David Lehman endorses a charge of anti-Semitism made in that book against the late James Baldwin. Mr. Lehman describes Baldwin's statements in a lecture at the University of Massachusetts on the Jesse Jackson/"Hymietown" affair of 1984 as "worrisome, even offensive." I doubt there was ever anyone less afraid of being thought "worrisome" to any orthodoxy of thought, but since the charges are being repeated in print, a response should be made. As I also have read the transcript of the lecture in question, and as I am the author of a forthcoming biography of Baldwin, perhaps I may be given the space to reply.

First and most important, Lehman has been unfairly selective in choosing which parts of the lecture to set before your readers. Baldwin's concluding remarks on the Jackson affair in the lecture-room that morning (February 28, 1984) ought to have made Lehman more cautious. At the close of the question-answer session, Baldwin was asked by a student if Jackson's Rainbow Coalition could include Jews. The remainder of the exchange goes as follows:

Baldwin: Of course. How could it not?
Student: In the light of what he said . . .
B: In the light of what he said . . .
S: . . . about Jews.
B: In the light of what he's allegedly said about Jews. What did he say about Jews?
S: He called them "Hymies" and New York "Hymietown."
B: Yes.
S: How should that be construed to mean . . .
B: I can't answer that. I know that the Rainbow . . .
S: What does he think about Jews being part of the Rainbow Coalition?
B: Well, until, until he said that, I had no reason to wonder about it, neither did you. *Now that he has made an anti-Semitic remark, one has the right to question everything. It is a very serious event, maybe a disastrous event.* I can't answer the question otherwise. [Emphasis added]

In a similar vein, Lehman has misunderstood Baldwin's illustration about black and Puerto Rican boys in the garment district turning on their Jewish bosses and starting to "hate" them. The point is, admittedly, not well expressed, being squeezed out from a crowd of parentheses and pauses (Baldwin was extemporizing), but in my own reading of the passage, the crucial point Baldwin was making was that ethnic friction here grows out of the economic hierarchy. If the black boy didn't always find himself pushing a truck, he wouldn't need to hate his boss. If the boss happens to be a Jew, Baldwin says, then that seems to make the boy an anti-Semite, but "the fact that their bosses are Jews is absolutely unimportant; what is important is that they are pushing those trucks."

Finally, Lehman finds it worrisome that Baldwin should crack a joke in the course of suggesting that the media might have been manipulating the public response to Jackson's regrettable (but private) remarks, *viz*: "I smell a rat somewhere. It doesn't seem entirely – can we use the word? – *kosher*." It apparently needs pointing out to Mr. Lehman that Baldwin was trying to be funny. And even if you are of the cast of mind that seeks dark significance in all ironic asides and witticisms, it doesn't work with this one.

James Campbell
London, England

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David Lehman replies:

I've never been convinced by the argument that the maker of an obnoxious remark is the victim of selective quotation. If during dinner I threaten to punch you, you're not going to remember "pass the salt." The central fact in this case is that a revered author belonging to one minority group slurred the members of another such group, in a public gathering before an impressionable audience, at a time when tensions between the two groups were running high. I submit that "plainly worrisome, even offensive" is a rather mild and restrained way to characterize the situation. While I agree with Mr. Campbell that a willingness to deviate from "any orthodoxy of thought" is a generally commendable trait in an intellectual, most of us do make an exception for certain cherished orthodoxies – such as the idea that racial, religious, and ethnic prejudice is morally repugnant.

David Lehman
Ithaca, New York

To the Editor:

It happened during Easter night, March 29, 1989. A whole village was invaded by a lineup of lorries. Their motor-rumble filled the air. When I looked out of the window I saw a lot of policemen and civilians. Later I realized that among them were the men from the so-called "Securitate," the Romanian political police. They rapped at the windows of houses. We were all taken to the village's main street, and we had to produce our identity cards. We were ordered to stand in lines, and later the male population had to climb into the lorries. The police started beating the women and kicking the children. Since I wasn't an inhabitant of the village, I was ordered to leave, and I received a hard beating with a rubber truncheon. In the dark I could recognize the daughter of our minister being raped. Her mother was otherwise humiliated. The minister himself was dragged away. Two other young girls were raped. It was a terrible scene, and I could do nothing.

Steffán György
Budapest, Hungary

To the Editor:

I am writing about the largest national minority in Europe, the 2.5 million Hungarians living in Transylvania, Romania. Until the First World War, Transylvania had been either independent or a part of Hungary. It had to its credit a flourishing cultural life, the very first edict of religious tolerance, and universities hundreds of years old that taught in the Hungarian language.

The past forty years have seen the gradual debarring of the Hungarians of Romania from all fundamental rights. Cast as a bone to a Romania living in abject poverty, terrified and defenseless in the grip of the dictator Ceausescu, the Hungarians, native to Transylvania for a thousand years, were held up as hated aliens. Hate has struck terrible roots. We wanted to believe that the Romanian revolution of last December, sparked by the Hungarian Pastor László Tõkés, had burned out these roots. We now see that it has not.

We do not wish to have Europe's borders changed, but we are hearing more and more – from recent fugi-

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tives, relatives, friends, film footage, and news releases – about the terrible pogrom perpetrated against the Hungarian minority. We know that the majority of Romanians are horrified to see the bloodthirsty mob that has been made drunk and given iron bars, and they commiserate with the persecuted whose only sin has been to ask that the rights and institutions taken away from them by the dictatorship be restored. However, the massacre did indeed take place; those responsible for law and order did not intervene, and the lorries carrying thugs did arrive one after another in the village.

Zsuzsa Takács
Budapest, Hungary

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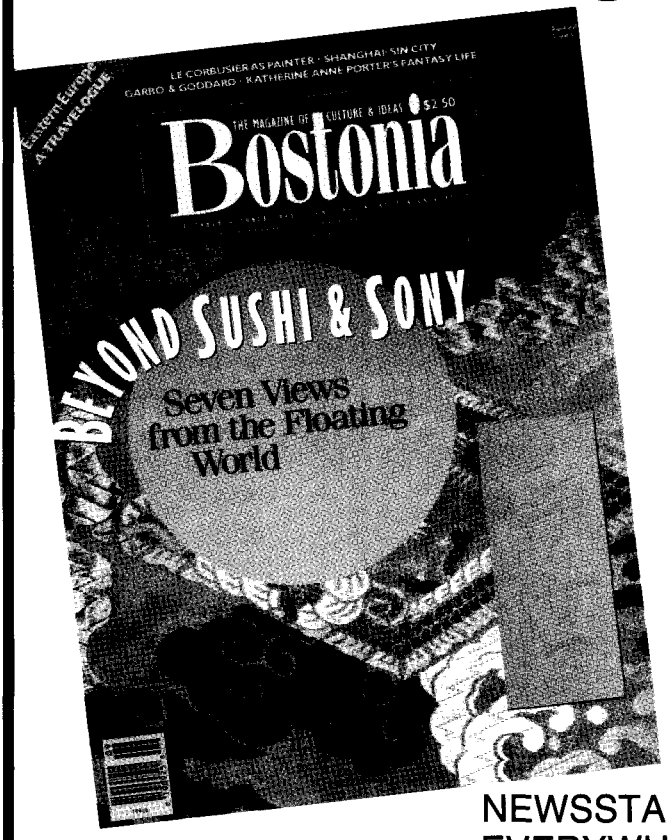
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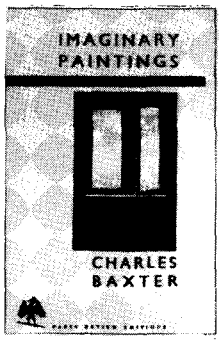

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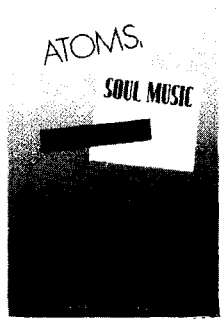

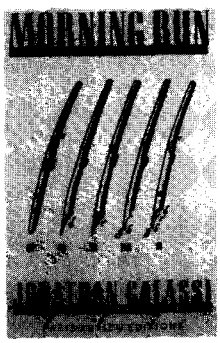

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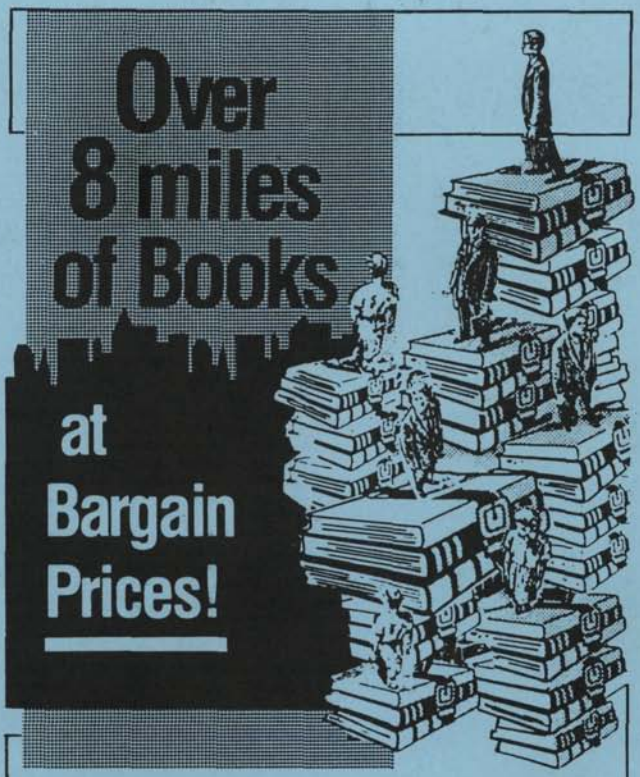

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Mother and Sister of the Artist (c. 1893) by Edouard Vuillard. Oil on canvas. 18" x 22". Courtesy of The Museum of Modern Art.

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Fisherman's Last Supper (1938) by Marsden Hartley. Oil on board. 22" x 28". Courtesy Salander-O'Reilly Galleries.

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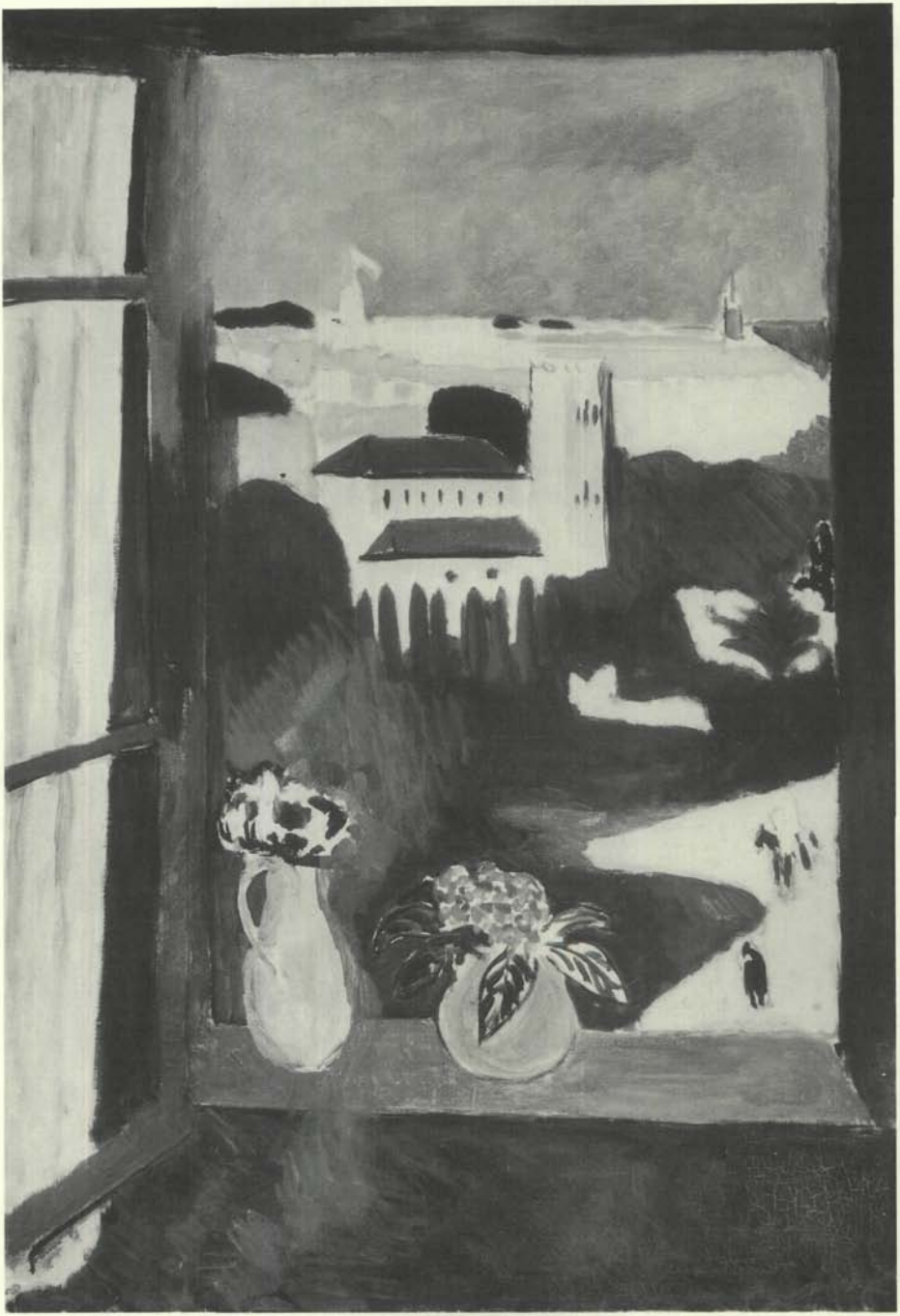

Landscape Viewed from a Window (1912/1913) by Henri Matisse. Oil on canvas. 45 and 1/4" x 31 and 1/2". Courtesy of the Museum of Modern Art.

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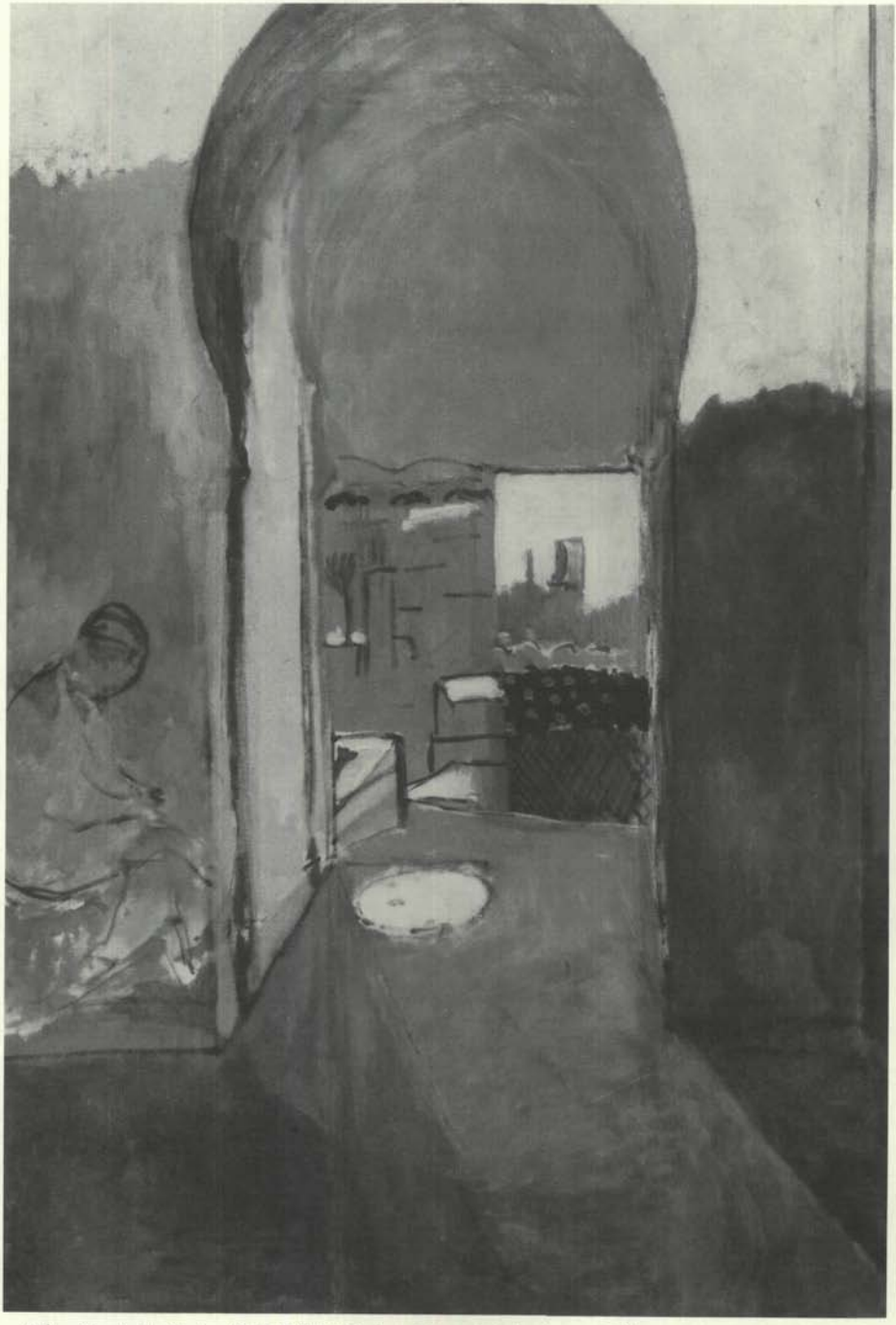

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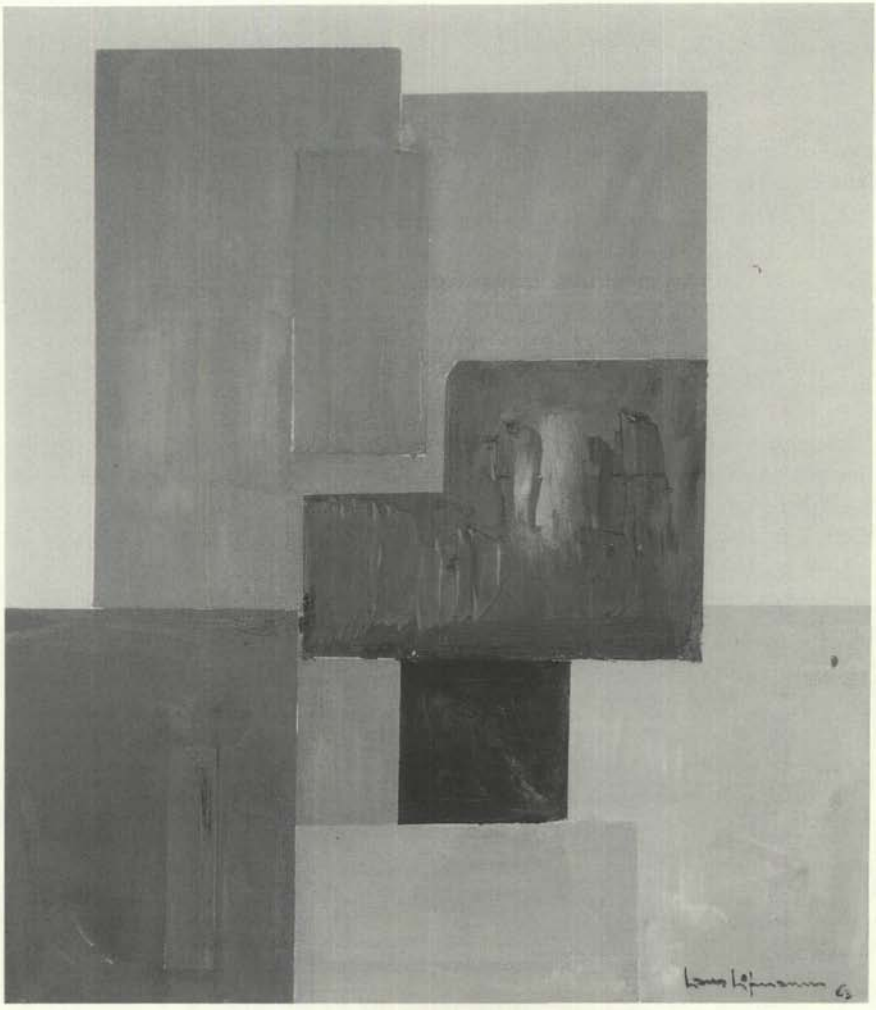

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